Chris Nicholls

MARSHLAND MEMORIES

by R. P. M.

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

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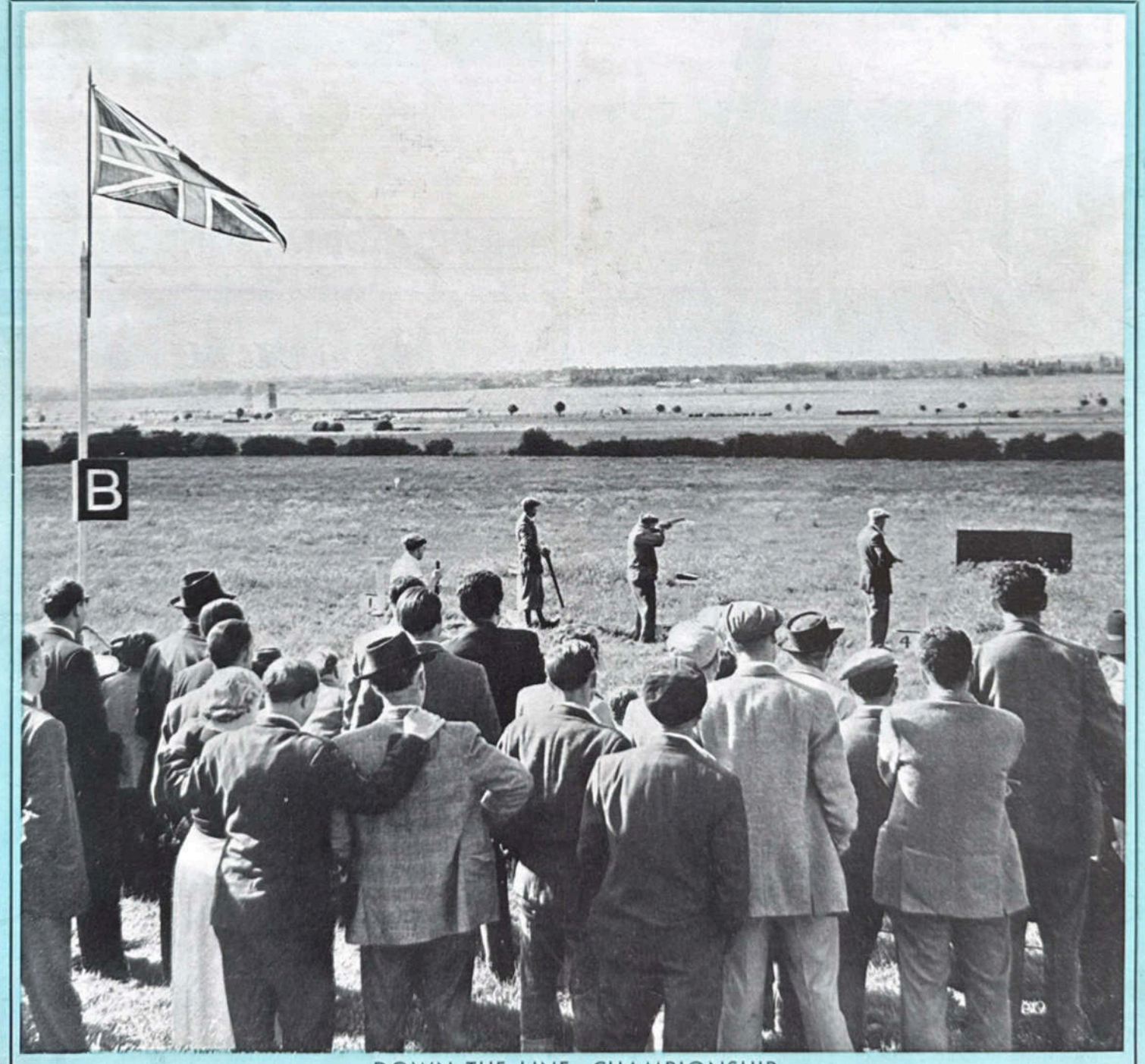

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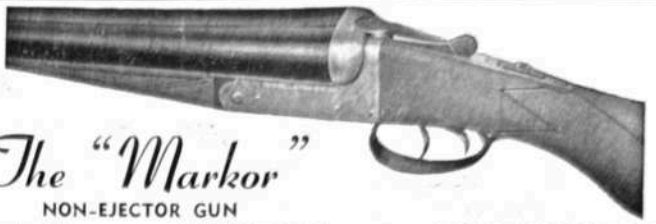

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

DURING this recent rook-shooting season local farmers arranged with the urban authorities for the shooting of young rooks in some grounds of a certain seaside town. And as a result numerous complaints were registered by residents—in fact quite a little "storm in a tea-cup."

While it can be understood that urban residents are not used to a fusillade of shots or indeed to any shots at all, within hearing of their trim villas, it is unreasonable to associate shooting with any kind of inhumanity. It is all well-known that the firing of 12-bore guns in built-up areas is disturbing—there being none of the spaces of the countryside to swallow up the noise. But one way and another it should be explained to town dwellers that the use of a shotgun is one of the kindest means, as well as one of the most effective of keeping the rook population under reasonable control. And it has long been established and officially recognised that the rook must not be allowed to get out of hand.

This little event has a definite bearing upon the whole matter of urban and suburban vermin—a matter which has been discussed on previous occasions in this journal. For the fact is—and it becomes more apparent every day—that urban areas, many of which have sadly encroached on good farming land, are in many cases comparatively safe breeding haunts for vermin. For apart from the danger and difficulty of dealing with these pests, few residents have any knowledge of the subject. Thus, if not attacked by experts, nothing could or would be done.

Yet there is nothing new in town or city rook shooting. At the end of last century there was a rookery in the grounds of one of the Oxford colleges, and it was the custom among some of the younger dons to make up rook-shooting parties at the beginning of the summer term. That was more than half a century ago. As far as is now known there were no complaints. The question may be asked: is the country becoming too soft in these matters?

In a country which is rapidly becoming over-urbanised it is to be expected that many wrong notions and much misunderstanding in regard to what is essentially rural will be heard. This is natural. But no countryman likes to be told how to run his own business! Rook shooting has long been established as the best means to keep this bird under control, and as long as there are rookeries in or about towns local residents must know that the numbers of the birds have to be thinned out. It is all very well for those who have no responsibility in the matter to register complaints. But let them see what rooks can do to young crops. However, all this poses the larger question of vermin which breed and have their being in suburban or semi-suburban areas, and are free to raid adjacent game preserves at their convenience. Owing to the nature and lay-out of a town it may be difficult, if not dangerous, to use a gun for the purpose. Other means then must be sought. The point is that suburban vermin of every sort (not just rats and mice) must not be allowed to increase with impunity.

* * *

PIGEON CAN TAKE IT

A reader has sent us a cutting from the *Daily Express* which reads: "Pheasants and partridges get 'drunk' too easily—but pigeon can take it. So one of the Ministry of Agriculture's brightest ideas looks like ending in failure. The idea was to get the pigeon—No. 1 pest on most farms—staggering around in a stupor, easy targets for shotguns. Drugged pellets were put down in the fields of Norfolk and Suffolk. But it is the pheasants and partridges which are staggering around with a 'hangover'; the pigeon continue their raids on fields of peas and kale. Said a Ministry of Agriculture official yesterday: 'The pigeon is tough, and the pellets aren't having much effect on him.'" So far, so good, but we had no idea that drugged or intoxicated pigeon were to be finished off with shotguns.

WILDFOWL REFUGES

Just what progress has been made over the years in providing for geese and duck on Federal waterfowl refuges was a prevalent question at the recent Congressional hearings on Bills that would require the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to spend not less than 40 per cent of the duck stamp receipts for the purchase of additional wildfowl lands. Since skimpy regular appropriations have forced the Service to use a larger part of the duck stamp money for the maintenance and development of wildfowl refuges, many wanted to know what has been accomplished, the Wildlife Management Institute reports. In fact, the 214,000 acres of marshland which have been purchased with duck stamp funds and about 3¼ million other acres of wildfowl refuge land have been developed and are being *maintained* with this money. This work is important to the wildfowl programme. Without development, marshland could not be made to provide food and living space for maximum numbers of geese and duck, and without appropriate maintenance the improved areas soon would lose their desirable productivity. Currently, the Service is farming 98,925 acres to raise food for the hordes of duck and geese that frequent the refuges. At certain times of the year about one-half of the Continent's population of wildfowl is dependent on these areas. In addition to this vital function, the wildfowl refuges—and other units of the national refuge system—are a haven for picnickers, shooters, fishermen, artists, photographers, and many others. More than five million persons visited the refuges last year. Open to public shooting are 527,207 acres of wildfowl refuge lands and 2,100,000 acres of big game and upland game refuges. While sportsmen undeniably desire to have more of the duck stamp receipts used for land acquisition, the benefits of refuge development and maintenance work for wildfowl should not be overlooked. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that if the Service is required to earmark a substantial part of the duck stamp money for land purchase, this vital work will come to a near standstill unless the Congress appropriates sufficient money for this purpose, which it is not now doing.

BASS IN BULK

Bass are considered by a majority of sea anglers to be the most sporting of the fish to be found in the inshore waters of the British Isles, and the angler who fishes for bass and nothing else—and there are many such specialists — expects a fairly high percentage of blank days. Immature bass, fish of anything below 1½lb. in weight, can be caught with comparative ease, for they swim in shoals and have not developed the protective instincts that endear their elders to confirmed bass anglers. A catch that might constitute a bag record was recently achieved by three anglers fishing in the Solent, for in two days they weighed in more than 2 cwt. of bass. The heaviest weighed 8¼lb. and none weighed less than 1½lb. This was an amazing catch, and it may partly be accounted for by the fact that anglers used live sand eels as bait. These little eels are difficult to obtain in numbers, and they are so delicate that one has to take extraordinary care to keep them alive and healthy even for a limited period. The trouble to which the anglers went obviously paid good dividends on this fishing excursion.

STATE-CONTROLLED WOODLAND

Kent, with six state forests, is playing a leading part in a Forestry Commission plan to get 5,000,000 acres of state-controlled woodland. Since the war 50,000 acres in Kent have been planted with trees. At Lyminge, near Canterbury, the Commission are making an effort to preserve and improve amenities by planting a mixture of trees. Large blocks of pines are being broken up by hard wood belts. Every year the pines provide more than 30,000 pit props for the Kent coal-mining industry. Other trees make poles for fencing, hop poles and rustic work for local farmers.

FIGHTING RABBITS

We have often witnessed some of the boxing contests staged by hares in their season, but aggressively-minded rabbits were of less interest to us, until we read a headline in a west country newspaper last week: "Farmers must keep fighting rabbits."

Rabbits and Wrynecks

by Tower-Bird

ALTHOUGH I say it myself, I have always been a pretty observant fellow, mainly because my father impressed upon me the pleasures and profits there were to be gained by keeping my eyes open and giving good attention to the smallest details. Also, of course, when I was a boy, I spent all available time about the woods and fields, birds'-nesting, etc. with other little varmits, or in the company of certain keepers who took a kindly interest in me. In short, my boyhood days (as those since!) were spent with eyes closely focused on trees, bushes, water, sky, and ground, and such training leads one to "miss very little" when one is abroad in the countryside.

The foregoing facts were passing through my mind as I walked in the hot Sabbath sunshine along the ridge of the South Downs, for it had suddenly dawned on me that my powers of observation were not quite so good as I believe them to be, and that I was now stumped by a very simple problem. I had decided that morning to go for a 15-mile tramp across downland where, until myxomatosis swept the district, there had been swarms of rabbits—far too many of them. As I had not been that way since the disease first broke out, I wanted to see what effect the removal of rabbits had had on the downland herbage, particularly in the vicinity of big burrowings. I knew the ground pretty intimately, so that any great change that had been brought about since the rabbits vanished would be obvious to me.

Without going into details, I will say at once that a very great change had overcome a number of areas where vegetation had once been kept down by hordes of nibbling conies. I am no botanist, so that I am unable to give the names of many of the plants which have increased and spread to quite an extraordinary extent. But, without any doubt at all, a vast (and not everywhere a gradual) change has overcome areas where rabbits once kept the growth in check. But my powers of observation appeared lacking in the fact that I had never seemed to notice whether rabbits eat some of the more common growths, such as tiny briar and bramble shoots showing above the ground. Yet, judging by the way that great patches of young brambles are appearing among the bracken and other herbage, I think rabbits must, in the past, have kept these young shoots nibbled flush with the ground.

Apart from the brambles, I note that "seedling" ash and other trees are springing up (in dense colonies in some places) where I had never seen them before. I do know that rabbits like ash, and I once had the job of killing down the last rabbit in many acres of ash-plantation for a man who had bought the estate and discovered that most of the young ash trees had been barked by rabbits. I have been told that some farmers now wish that they had a reasonable number of rabbits back on their land, since all manner of growth is springing up and spreading on otherwise good grazing.

Climbing Stoats

I also hear from several places about the country that stoats have this year played greater havoc among the nests of tree- and bush-nesting birds than ever before. Your anti-rabbit-pro-myxomatosis man may say that stoats, in the absence of rabbits, will kill far more mice, etc., and this may well be the case, but, since stoats are good climbers (far better, in fact, than most people realise) one could only expect that they would take more keenly to birds'-nesting than they did when rabbits were available. And once a stoat has found how simple a matter it is to find nests, and what pleasant diet can be that of eggs and young, it will, in future, give less attention during the nesting season to mice, etc., and, of course, litters of young stoats will be educated, as soon as they can climb, into the art of birds'-nesting.

But the theory that the most noticeable decrease of grey squirrels in many parts (even where serious war has not been waged upon them by man) is due to the killing of them, and the raiding of their dreys for young, by stoats, I just do not believe. There are no doubt a number of instances of this sort of thing, but it cannot be general, and I am convinced that some epidemic is responsible.

Sitting hard, despite herbage cut round the nest.

As I have said before, when grey squirrels were dying in scores last year on one estate, I sent some bodies for post-mortem, and was informed that the trouble could best be named "virulent squirrel 'flu."

Oak Bark for Tanneries

I have just been reading my friend "Skim Coulter's" weekly farming article in *The Southern Weekly*, and I hope that he will forgive me for quoting two paragraphs which have a bearing on a conversation I had recently with an old Sussex sportsman and naturalist. Writes "Skim": "There is never really anything new in the countryside—just variations of old themes. Just at the moment forestry people are jumping about with joy because the tanneries are showing a very lively interest in the bark of the sitka spruce . . . When I was a lad there was a tremendous trade for oak bark for the tanneries. Men with special tools, known as barking-irons, would strip not only all the felled trees, but often those still standing would be stripped at least for 20ft. Old women and children had the job of gathering up all the bark and carefully stacking it and then thatching it with the larger slabs of bark; very neat and workmanlike we had to make them, too, or we would be curtly told to rebuild anew or stay at home."

My conversation with the old Sussex man began about shooting, and then turned to birds. Said he:

"I haven't heard a rining bird for more than three years."

I looked at him suspiciously (for I know what an oozling bird is!), and risked the question: "What do you call a rining bird?"

For a moment its real name escaped his memory, but he tried to describe it. "It used to come early in the spring just at the time when we were busy tree-rining" (i.e. stripping fallen oak of its bark for the tanneries). Then he described its call as a loud, clear *qui-qui-qui* and I knew that he meant the wryneck.

"That's it," he said; "wryneck's the bird I meant."

I went on to tell him that we, in Essex, always called it "the cuckoo's mate," since it arrives on these shores just before the time of the cuckoo—say at the end of March. I told him of a nesting-hole in the boards of an old lavatory in a cottage garden I knew which had been occupied year after year, and what funny little creatures with funny little ways were the fledgling wryneck when you held them in your open hand. (By an odd coincidence, two days after our conversation, a wryneck was calling in a garden between my companion's garden and my own.)

I have also heard this bird called the "snake bird" because of the way in which it is able to twist and writhe its neck. On returning home after my conversation, I looked up the wryneck in my "Coward," to see whether that great ornithologist referred to it as a rining bird. But, apparently, he had not heard of that name, either! But he states that it is from the "snake-like writhing of the neck that it gets its ordinary name." I wonder whether Coward was partly right and partly wrong on this point, and whether the bird did, in fact, get at least half of its name because it appeared during the season of rining?

Young Game Birds

I have said on earlier occasions that one of the sights that brings real joy to my old heart is that of a numerically strong covey of from half- to three-quarters-grown partridges rising and flying away, their wings tip-tilting, the direction of their flight purposeful and obvious. Yet there are plenty of other sights which bring almost equal joy. We were walking along a road yesterday which borders a large estate round which is a high wall. Suddenly Don pointed at something in the dense herbage between wall and road. I guessed that it was a pheasant, and gently I turned back the grass with the end of my stick, when up flew a hen of the species, *to settle on the wall-top.*

I called to Don, and we walked on for some yards, then climbed the bank on the opposite side of the road and concealed ourselves in the bracken. No sooner had we done so than the old pheasant flew down from the top of the wall, and, in less than a minute, she was leading 12 very small chicks up the side of the road. Some 15 yards farther on, she took them back into the cover of the grass—just before two or three cars came hurtling past. I have reared thousands of pheasants, and seen and aided countless wild broods, yet this little incident made the day for me.

I have no doubt that the chicks hatched from a nest just under the wall, but why, oh why, do pheasants and partridges so very frequently choose nesting sites beside a large public road, or some right-of-way along which people and dogs are for ever passing? I must have asked myself that question several hundreds of times, yet invariably such nests hatch off, unless the roadman comes along with his hook, or a dog runs into the sitting bird.

On the following day, the storm had blown itself out.

Marshland Memories

by R. P. M.

MY annual wildfowling holiday last season was, as usual, most pleasant, although the bag was not so great as in the previous year. But we enjoyed every minute of it, and wild goose figured on the menu. I do not know which is the best part of a wildfowling trip, but sometimes I think that perhaps the anticipation is! The sorting out of cartridges; the inevitable mental worry over shot size BB or No. 1; the amassing of wind-proof and water-proof clothing; the search for and mending of leaks in waders and the usual presentation to one's "better half" of sea-boot socks and stockings for the requisite darning.

Which reminds me that D. arrived with an enormous calico patch sewn on the heels of his sea-boot stockings. "Nobody else would sew them on for me," he said, "so I did them myself." I watched the result with interest throughout the week, fully prepared to tend his blisters, or order a pair of crutches for him, but my good intentions were in vain. He swears they were perfectly comfortable, and furthermore they showed little signs of wear, whereas the size of the potatoes in my most worn pair of sea-boot socks was nobody's business.

Looking back on that holiday, Saturday afternoon came at last and with all our gear piled in the car we set out in a howling gale on the 100-mile run to our fowling H.Q. The nearer we got to the coast the more intense became the gale, and to our bitter regret there was no hope of our being on the marsh before darkness fell. "You know what P. will say when we see him to-night," I said to D.—"You ought to have been down the marsh to-night, mate." And that was precisely what P did say when, having parked our gear and had tea we went to see him and hear the latest news of the marsh.

A Night of Nights

It had been a night of nights for those lucky locals who live on the spot, and, when the wind blows from the right quarter, can drop whatever they are doing, seize their guns, and hurry down to the sea-wall. P. himself had shot three geese, but there were two bags of five, and one stalwart, whose knowledge of the marsh is perhaps greater than that of anyone else in the district, had shot as many as he thought reasonable and then gone home. Even P.'s brother-in-law—a youngster of 16—had shot his first goose that night. In fact, he had gone further than that, and downed two with his first barrel, but how many cartridges he fired afterwards without results is a matter for his own conscience! However, as his tuition is in the safe hands of P., there is little doubt of his not being brought up the right way.

For those who rely on getting their geese the hard way, on the coast alone, this was a red-letter day; a flight of flights, probably the best flight of the whole season, and D. and I had missed it by no more than three-quarters of an hour. Even so, there was still hope, for the gale was still blowing when we eventually retired to bed, but when, after a restless night, the alarm brought me back to full consciousness at 4.45 a.m., the wind had dropped and the sky was a clear carpet of stars.

Navigation in the Darkness

We arrived on the marsh with plenty of time to spare, and, after the long and arduous walk along the sea-wall in darkness, I found my way to my favourite creek on the saltings with no difficulty at all. In fact, I surprised even myself, so accurate was my navigation, and as I settled myself comfortably on my air-cushion, it seemed only a matter of weeks, not 12 long months, since I last shot a goose from this carefully chosen place.

Way out in front I could hear the muted chatter of a large number of geese, and, as the sky grew gradually lighter, so my excitement mounted to fever pitch. Goose talk! To those who do not understand, the two words mean but little, but to the fowler they mean everything—feeling and emotions which no pen can describe. I sat spellbound as the chatter increased in volume, and in my imagination I could see the geese awakening and preening, stretching their wings and gradually getting more and more uneasy as the time to flight approached. The tide-edge was not far away and I could hear the thin piping of countless waders with now and again the hoarse bark of a cob gull, or the wild wailing call of the curlew.

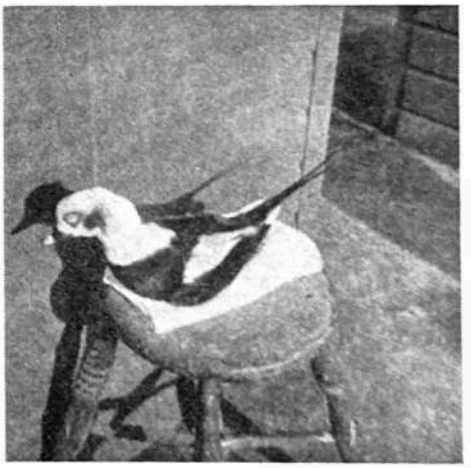
From behind me came the sudden whistle of wings and I looked up in time to see four mallard hurtling back to the marsh like bullets. A possible shot, but unwise with the geese where they were, so I let them go by unmolested and just then I became aware of a latecomer striding across the marsh in front of me. Latecomers always annoy me; they so often spoil sport for others, so I called to him to let him know my position and then slid back into my creek.

Minutes passed, and then the goose talk swelled to crescendo—a roar of wings like a mighty round of applause and the first gaggle lifted and headed in a black ragged mass towards the sea-wall. Peering through the grass on the edge of my creek, I could see that they were heading straight for me, and, feeling sure of a shot, I slid the safety catch of my magnum 12-bore to the firing position. I need not have bothered, for when they were about 150 yards away they suddenly veered off and climbed as only geese can climb, and almost simultaneously a shot rang out directly in front of me.

In Need of Fatherly Advice

That was the start of that morning flight, and so it went on. Skein after skein of geese came in heading my way, and the late comer, sitting about a 100 yards *in front* of me, fired at every skein. He must have fired at least 20 cartridges and as every bird could see him, they passed him by at least three gunshots out of range. To say I was angry was to say the least; I was livid, and as soon as the flight was over I hauled myself out of my creek and strode purposefully across towards the despoiler of the morning's sport.

When I reached him I found a mere youth of about 15 and I lost no time in giving him some sound fatherly advice. "I didn't think they were out of range," he said, "I've shot some as high as that already this season. I could see my shots strike them every time, but I couldn't get BB's." "What are you using?"



The long-tailed duck—or, rather, drake.

I snapped, and the answer came back: Number fours." After that, I told him several things, which included remarks about sitting in front of other guns, shooting at geese out of range and spoiling sport for others. I also told him that, as far as I could see, he never touched a feather on a goose, and, when he left me he was immediately set upon by two other gunners. From their threatening fists and upraised voices I rather gathered that their advice was not so fatherly as mine!

Shortly after that, as I was discussing the flight with D., I observed another youngster coming in our direction—a smaller one this time. He had no gun under his arm, but a handsome pinkfoot was dangling from his hand, and so small was he that, as he jumped

the creeks and trudged purposefully through the marram grass and sea-lavender, the tail of the bird was often dragged along the ground. A handsome youngster, 12 or 13 years of age with fair, wind-ruffled hair and clear blue eyes—I took a liking to him at once. "Hello," I said. "You've done all right. Did you put some salt on his tail?'" "No," he replied grinning, "I picked it up over there." "Who are you, then?" I said, and when he replied: "I'm Ken ———'s lad," the mystery was solved. I know his father well—tall and lean but with muscles like whipcord; a fine and consistent shot with a great knowledge of the marsh. Semi-professional fowler, shoregunner and puntsman, and one who, before the foul man-imported scourge of myxomatosis swept through the land, counted his annual take of rabbits not in hundreds, but in thousands of couple. An easy going and friendly sportsman, but one who brooks no argument when another tries to claim his goose as it falls from the sky.

The Right Blood in His Veins

This, then, was his son, and I gather he had been with his father in the gale the night before. A goose had been brought down, but not picked up, and the youngster had come down at first light to find it. Not many lads of his age would face the wild wind-swept darkness of that marsh alone, but he has the right blood in his veins. I take off my hat to him, and may he one day be as great a wildfowler as his father.

An Amusing Incident

And talking of claiming other people's geese, there was an unfortunate, but slightly amusing incident during one evening flight. The geese came in late—so late in fact that when they did arrive, although the air was full of the soul-stirring music of their cries and several skeins passed directly overhead, I could not see a single bird. Not so a senior Air Force officer ensconced not far from D. He must have been an experienced night fighter pilot, for suddenly his gun swept up, a stab of flame pierced the gloom and seconds later came that well-known thump as a goose fell about 30 yards from D. It was not D.'s goose, so he waited for the officer to collect it, but before that worthy could do so, a large nondescript dog, like Black Shuck himself, appeared from nowhere, scooped up the goose and disappeared into the darkness!

Perhaps the most unusual incident of the trip was the long-tailed duck—or drake to be more precise. This bird suddenly swept over me on morning flight. I could see it was a duck of some sort, but when I picked it up I was amazed. Not only is it the only one I have heard of being shot on this part of the coast, but its colouring took my breath away. The sharply contrasting jet black and pure white, the grey shadowing on the cheeks, the pink and black bill, and that long, delicate black tail all combined to make it a most handsome bird and I wished with all my heart that I was sufficiently skilled as a taxidermist to mount it as a collector's specimen.

On the last morning we were joined by G.—a fine fellow and a keen sportsman who had left home at 3.30 a.m. in his veteran Lagonda to meet us half-an-hour before daylight. He was at the appointed place with time to spare and I sincerely hoped that such keenness would be rewarded by a goose. Poor G.! his luck was out. He had only one party over him and I heard him fire. Then I heard the boom of D.'s historic 8-bore and a low-flying and obviously mortally hit goose passed by me at about 100 yards, on its way back to the muds. It was virtually out of range, but as it was so obviously badly hit I hoped a long shot might prove sufficient to bring it down, so I let drive with 1¼ ozs. of BB. I saw my shot strike home, but still it carried on, gradually losing height until it passed from my sight.

Those were the only shots we fired that morning, and it turned out that all three had been at the same goose, and although we searched the muds for a full hour afterwards, not a trace of it did we find. Still, perhaps it was just as well because had we done so, we should have had to take it to a biological laboratory to get it evenly divided into three portions!

☆ ☆ ☆

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

July 16: Childrey (near Wantage) C.P.S.A. Open Sporting Shoot.

July 16: Wetherby and Dist. G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot.

July 16: South-West of England D.T.L. Championship, Scorsham Farm, Stratton, Bude, Cornwall.

July 16: The London G.C. Members' Skeet All Day.

July 16: Berks., Bucks., Oxon. and Wilts Sporting Championship.

July 17: North of England Skeet Championship, Harrogate G.C., Yorks.

July 20: Bowland and Dist. G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe. Evening practice.

July 20: Birmingham G.C. Practice night, members only.

July 20: Norfolk Sporting Championship, Taverham, Norwich.

July 20: Droitwich G.C., Hanbury Wharf. Members' Shoot.

July 21: Carlisle & District G.C. Double Rise Shoot, 6 p.m.

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Reports and Results

Principal results of the 21st International Tournament held at Collinstown, Dublin, under the auspices of the Irish Clay Pigeon Shooting Association.

First day. International Team Match: England A, 1,434 kills ex 1,500; Scotland A, 1,418; Wales A, 1,398; Ireland A, 1,395; England B, 1,399; Scotland B, 1,339; Ireland B, 1,308; Wales B, 1,229; England C, 1,392.

High Guns of the four countries (after ties had been shot off)—England: 1, W. Heald, 99 ex 100; 2, J. Wheater, 99; 3, A. Pratt, 98. Scotland: 1, E. R. Bruce, 97; 2, R. Love, 97; 3, J. Gillies, 97. Wales: 1, T. E. Sanders, 8; 2, W. T. Jones, 98; 3, D. L. Roberts, 97. Ireland: 1, P. O'Callaghan, 98; 2, D. Kelly, 98; 3, A. Davidson, 98.

Mackintosh Trophy: New Zealand A, 1,462 kills ex 1,500; Australia B, 1,444; New Zealand B, 1,441; England A, 1,434; Australia A, 1,423; Scotland A, 1,418; England B, 1,399; Wales A, 1,398; Ireland A, 1,395; England C, 1,392; Scotland B, 1,339; Ireland B, 1,308; Wales B, 1,229.

High Guns: New Zealand A, E. Hartley and H. C. Walker, 100 ex 100; New Zealand B, E. Green, 99; Australia B, A. F. Burns, 99; Australia A, Newton Thomas, 99. Elliott Altes Event: Wales 1,398 kills ex 1,500; Ireland, 1,395.

Second day. British Open Championship: Winner, R. D. Browning (England), 100 kills ex 100, after a shoot-off with W. R. Skewes (England); 3, P. Stanbury, 99, after a shoot-off. Other Class A prize-winners: W. T. Jones, 99; E. R. Bruce, 99; H. W. Tidd, 99; J. Wheater, 98. Class B: T. Brockie, 98; K. P. Taylor and R. Love, 97; J. Tait and R. Young, 96; W. H. James, 95. Class C: J. Magee and P. O'Callaghan, 97; C. Campbell Ingram, 93; A. Boyd, 90; E. W. Evans, 89; M. Sinnett, 88.

Governor General's Team Event: England A, 975 kills ex 1,000; England B, 969; Scotland, 962; Wales, 936; Ireland A, 931; England C, 928; Ireland B, 883.

High Gun over the two days: J. Wheater (England), 197 kills ex 200 after shooting off with W. T. Jones (Wales).

Third day. Double-Rise Event (40 pairs): 1, Scotland A, 1,312 points ex 1,500 (J. Tait 149, T. Sim 145, W. Grant 144); 2, Wales A, 1,299 (W. T. Jones 168, D. M. R. Jones 143, S. C. Miles 140); 3, England A, 1,229 (R. J. Cooper 143, R. D. Browning 141, F. M. McFarland 135); 4, Ireland A, 1,215 (D. McCalden 153, B. Mullen 143, F. Nixon 135); 5, Scotland B, 1,213 (G. Caithness 141, D. F. Ferguson 136, M. Anderson 129); 6, England B, 1,167 (W. J. Sable 143, W. L. Harris 135, W. J. C. Bassett 129). Open Event: 1, F. R. Readhead, 153; 2, T. H. Falconer, 131; 3, M. Holmes and A. Kehoe, 129.

High Gun of the Tournament (three days): W. T. Jones (Wales), 266 kills ex 280.

Details of scores will be published in the "*C.P.S. News*," the official journal of the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association, subscription 10s. per annum, or free to Members (£1 per annum).

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The North Wales Gun Club held its second Annual Open Double Rise Championship Clay Pigeon Shoot, followed by the fourth Annual Open Down-the-Line Clay Pigeon Shoot. Both shoots were held under doubtful weather conditions. The lay-out of the field, including the traps and targets, were highly commended by various shooters. Exactly 50 guns attended the 100-bird down-the-line on Saturday. The attendance on Friday was disappointing. A number of additional guns shot exclusively over the Pool Traps. Prize-winners were as follows:

Double Rise Championship High Gun, Mr. W. T. Jones (Carmarthen), with excellent total of 217 ex 250 points, who received the Perpetual M. J. Thomas Challenge Cup, blazer badge and cash prize. The runner-up was Mr. G. Jones, with a score of 205 ex 250 points. Class A.: 1, Mr. G. Jones, Rhosesmor; 2, Mr. A. Poskitt, Doncaster; 3, Mr. D. T. Jones, Rhosesmor; 4, Mr. A. T. Brown, St. Asaph. Class B.: 1, Mr. D. H. Finer, Sutton Coldfield; 2, Mr. D. M. R. Jones, Rhosesmor; 3, Mr. C. R. Booth; 4, Mr. K. P. Taylor; 5, Mr. J. M. Evans, Llandissilio; 6, Mr. C. E. D. Cropp, St. Asaph; 7, Mr. C. Pendleton, St. Asaph. The cup was presented by the doner, Mr. M. J. Thomas, of Corwen, to winner. We are all delighted to see that Mr. Thomas has now fully recovered from his recent illness.

I.C.I. North Wales Double Rise Area Championship: Shield and medal, Mr. G. Jones, Rhosesmor; novice, Mr. A. T. Brown, St. Asaph. The shield, medal and novice prize were kindly presented by I.C.I. Ltd. (Metals Division).

Our Down-the-Line Shoot on Saturday attracted 50 competitors, who gave an excellent performance. The field was divided into four classes and six prizes were won in each class, together with the High Gun prize. The winners were as follows:

Esmor Challenge Cup, High Gun Statue and Cash Prize, Mr. W. Heald, Fleetwood, with a score of 98 ex 100, the runner-up being Mr. S. Bamber with a score of 95 ex 100. Class A.: 1, Mr. S. Bamber; 2, Mr. C. R. Booth; 3, Mr. G. Jones, Rhosesmor; 4, Mr. A. Poskitt, Doncaster; 5, Mr. S. T. Rimmer, Liverpool; 6, Mr. E. Fear. Class B: 1, Mr. D. L. Roberts, Oswestry; 2 (equal), Mr. A. T. Brown, St. Asaph, and Mr. A. E. Lloyd, Old Colwyn; 4 (equal), Mr. D. R. Jones, Rhosesmor, and Mr. J. Anslow, Shirlett Broeley; 6, Mr. G. Howell, Carmarthen. Class C.: 1, Mr. P. Rogers, Manchester; 2, Mr. A. Heald, Fleetwood; 3, T. D. Jones; 4 (equal), J. Williamson and Y. E. Jones, St. Asaph; 6 (equal), Mr. R. Sheen, Nantwich, Mr. J. H. Windle, and Mr. T. R. Evans. Class D.: 1, Mr. Wooton; 2, Mr. J. Williams; 3, Mr. W. H. Jones; 4, Mr. J. M. Evans, Carmarthen; 5, Dr. E. C. Davies, Llandyssul; 6, Mr. J. Lawton.

Colts Competition, under 18: The winner was 13-year-old V. C. Pendleton, Rhuallt, St. Asaph, with a fine score of 18 ex 25. He received the Cup outright. He was closely followed by Alun H. Brown, again of St. Asaph. We offer our heartiest congratulations to both these young shooters and look forward to them making their mark for Wales in the future. The prizes were very kindly and charmingly presented by Mrs J. N. Evans, of Carmarthen, wife of the Welsh captain for 1955.

Forthcoming Field Trials

July 19 and 20: Irish Setter Association (England) and Setter and Pointer Club. (Shap.) Judges: Mr. Maurice Moreton and Ltd.-Col. F. E. B. Wignall.

July 22 and 23: Yorkshire Gundog Club (Pointers and Setters). (On Grouse. Nookton and Newbiggin Moors, near Blanchland.)

July 25 and 26: English Setter Club (Pointers and Setters). (On Grouse at Blanchland, Co. Durham.) Judges: Mrs. E. L. Buist and J. A. Roberts.

Air-Guns and Air-Pistols

by North Country

PERHAPS for too long this subject has been looked upon as a "play-ground" for boys which does not warrant the serious attention that is lavished upon ordinary firearms both in books and articles. At any rate, it appears never to have received the notice which it so richly deserves. For as Mr. L. Wesley, the author of a book, "Air-Guns and Air-Pistols" (to be published in mid-November*) points out in his introduction, to do full justice to such a vast subject far more space would be needed than is at his disposal. "It would not, in fact, be an exaggeration to say that a whole book of this size could be written about any one type of air weapon mentioned within these pages."

While the author makes it clear that this is not intended to be a technical work, he admits that during the past 20 years he has made an extensive study of firearms in general and of air-guns in particular. The work has been compiled to give information that should interest everyone from the schoolboy owning a Junior air-gun to the adult interested in high-power pneumatic rifles. But I do not know that all will agree with the author's assertion that "however many weapons a man may possess he will get far more sport from a good air-rifle than he will from all the rest of his guns together."

I am glad to see that safety has been brought into the first few pages, and figures are quoted which show that during the three years ending February 28, 1934, a total of 320 persons were injured by air-guns, air-rifles and air-pistols, and in 63 of these cases the injuries were of a serious nature. In only two instances were the accidents due to any mechanical fault with the weapon itself.

Classification of Weapons

In his classification of air weapons the author points out that although there are hundreds of thousands of air-rifles in use today, the great majority of "air-gunners" are familiar only with those whose makers' names are so well known as to be almost household words. "Who would think of an air-gun as having more than one barrel? Yet types exist having two, three, four and five barrels and I have even had an air-operated goose-gun with seven barrels." Of air-pistols he says that

Now obsolete. Removable barrel similar to modern Webley air pistol.

these weapons are designed to be aimed and discharged with one hand, and can have either rifled or smooth-bore barrels. The two main classifications of all air weapons are "spring-operated" and "pneumatic" or "pump-up."

As the author says, a spring-operated air weapon is one in which the air is compressed at the moment of discharging the arm. Nearly all such weapons consist essentially of a smooth-walled cylinder containing a well-fitting piston, driven by a powerful spring. Provision is made by suitably arranged levers to push or draw this piston backwards thus compressing the spring where it is held by the sear. When the trigger is pressed, the sear is disengaged from the piston which is driven forward violently. This results in the air which is contained in the cylinder in front of the piston being compressed and escaping down the barrel of the arm, thus projecting the pellet, slug, or dart with great force.

Pneumatic or "pump-up" weapons, the author goes on to say, operate on an entirely different system. It is true that they make use of compressed air as a propellent, but in this case the air is first compressed or condensed into a reservoir or chamber and is retained there under compression until the arm is discharged. This is usually accomplished by pumping air into the air-chamber or reservoir by means of a single-stage air pump, the air-chamber being fitted with either one or two valves. This type can be divided again into two headings: (1) Those charged by means of a self-contained air pump arranged as an integral part of the weapon itself. (2) Those in which an entirely separate pump is employed. The former include all the modern pneumatics, while the latter embrace mainly the older types. There are both single-shot and repeating pneumatic guns and rifles, and also single-barrelled and multi-barrelled weapons. Some of these weapons, it is stated had their air reservoir contained in the stock or butt, or in a cylinder underneath the barrel, while other air storage containers consisted of a hollow metal ball which was usually fixed to the underside of the gun.

Writing of the gas-rifle, Mr. Wesley says that this type substitutes liquified carbon-dioxide gas for compressed air. Originally such gas-rifles were provided with a small detachable gas cylinder generally located underneath and parallel to the barrel. These cylinders when empty were intended to be exchanged by the makers or their agents for full ones, but modern American-made gas-rifles now have the gas cylinder as an integral part of the rifle and a small supply cylinder sold with the rifle contains sufficient gas for many complete charges. Gas-operated weapons are usually repeaters in that one charging of gas will fire many shots, but normally the pellets or bullets have to be loaded one at a time, by hand.

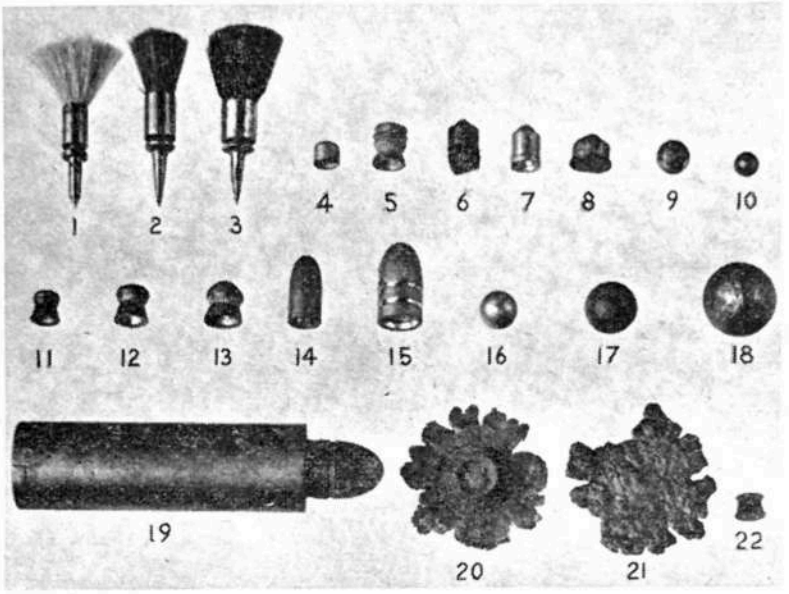
Gas Containers

Modern rifles using gas instead of air have a gas container running underneath the barrel and usually about as long as the barrel, and this container is filled by screwing the gas supply cylinder directly to it.

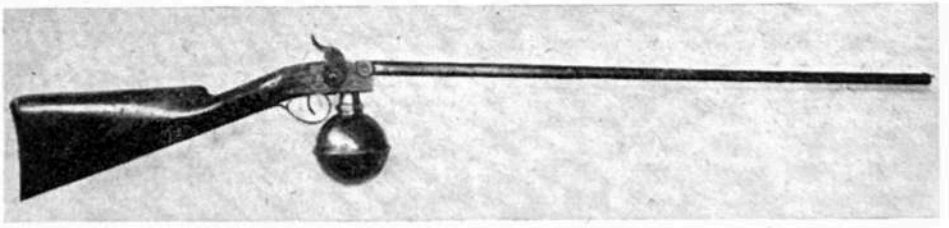
Now we come to blowpipes. And here the author says that while this is technically a pneumatic, it is not embraced by either of the two main groups, being the very simple blow-tube or blowpipe through which a dart is blown by the mouth. "This is an air-gun," he writes, "reduced to its simplest form, yet it is a very deadly weapon indeed and in skilful hands is capable of astonishing accuracy."

In a brief history the author states that the earliest known record of an air-gun was of a "Windbusche" made by Guter of Nuremburg in 1530, and it is therefore probable that Guter could be named as the true inventor. Various improvements were made by German, French, Polish, Dutch, Swiss and English gunmakers. Among those who played their part in producing and improving the air-gun, he adds, were Sars of Berlin, Contriner of Vienna, Muller of Warsaw, Bouillet of France, Speyer of Holland and Bate of England. And here is a sentence of special interest: "In 1607 another Nuremburg gunsmith named Dumbler made an air-gun that according to contemporary records 'shot through a thumb-thick plank.' The Town Council, however, refused to allow him to market it because it was held to be a 'murderous weapon with which a man might be killed and yet not know what had hit him'." Writing of the period between 1700 and 1750 the author says that calibres varied from .250 to .500 although a few guns were made with calibres up to .750, but these were the exceptions rather than the rule. An excellent chapter this will be found and naturally

(Continued on page 454, col. 2)



An illustration from the book of various types of projectiles.



.500 calibre pneumatic rifle (by Reilly of Holborn) with brass ball air reservoir.

* *Air-Guns and Air-Pistols, by L. Wesley (Cassell & Co. Ltd.).*

American Letter

from Hugh Monahan

(President of The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland)

Since writing this letter Mr. Monahan has flown back to England.

Sir,—On arrival in Houston, I went direct to the old areas I know so well down near Lake Sabine at Orange, Texas, and worked for the first month along the whole of that vast marsh and bayou country between St. Charles Bay and the Mississippi delta.

I have already given a description (in my writings last year) of the Louisiana and Texan fresh water marshes with their numerous forms of natural food for duck and geese which make it such a wonderful spot. However, increasingly it is noticed now that the snow geese and the blue geese which, twenty years ago did not bother about anything but the natural food, are now tending more and more to frequent consistently the rice fields. The Canada geese and the white-fronts are doing the same, but that is not too strange considering their habits. This has meant a decrease in the number of birds shot down there, because the farmers appreciate the geese picking the rice field and getting rid of the old red rice, but has not, of course, meant a decrease in the number of birds. They are just spread out more.

The next big change that is taking place is that of the white-fronts. These do not come down the Mississippi, but down the central flyway and move east along the Red River into Texas and Louisiana. Where at Lacassine twenty years ago 500 white-fronted geese were a large group, there are now 25,000. This species is very much the wildest of all the geese I have seen this side—not easily domesticated, and a shore bird. By this I do not mean a sea-feeder, but it seems to keep pretty close to the ocean. The numbers in Texas this year were pronounced to be unusually high.

The Canadas down there are those which somehow manage not to have heard of Cairo, Illinois, and come down the Mississippi and the central flyway. Mixed up amongst them one will see the small Richardson goose, and in Texas, of course, one does see the lesser Canada goose. The big fellow here is not big by British and central flyway standards, and I would put its average weight at about 8lb.

The pattern of migration this year was affected by pretty odd consideration of the weather. That month I spent in Texas and Louisiana the weather threw the book at us. We had temperatures up to 88°, twisters (tornados), snow, hail, rain and sweat. The results were that a tremendous number of birds were down there very, very late on. The other sad result noticeable was that the exceptional cold not only killed off a lot of azaleas, camellias and other sub-tropical plants and flowers, but caused untold damage to the peach, tomato, and cotton crop of eastern Texas. There were white-front geese in large numbers, blue-winged teal, and in fact hosts of every kind of duck still there on April 12 when I left for Reno, Nevada. I think that one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen was over these vast green and gold coloured marshes watching blue-winged teal flying over miles upon miles of wild iris of every colouration.

A lot of my work there was done back in the bayou country which to me is always fascinating. Miles and miles of cypress standing out of water were draped fully in Spanish moss. I can hardly describe it. In fact, I would have to paint it, and I am not prepared to do that for you now.

What duck were down in Texas were breeding very early. I noticed mallard families of week-old duck at least by the second week in March. This only goes to show that, given back the water and feed necessary, the States could become as big a breeder of wildfowl as Canada is at present. These particular duck by now would be very large and almost flying, and the old birds will be going into their eclipse plumage and coming back into their winter colours by July.

Flock Management of Canada Geese

A word of slight misgiving at this point. There seems to be a tendency amongst some to encourage flock management of Canada geese which, in my opinion, may well only create conditions comparable to what is happening at Horseshoe Lake at Cairo. I do not want to say more about this, because I would like to study the subject much further, but I do feel that I would rather see birds feed on the natural, historical food that they are used to, than start planting a human food such as corn for them. Personally, I have always had the feeling that if you are going to give a goose a napkin and ask him to sit at table with you, you have no right then to turn round and hit him over the head with a paddle. Wild geese are wild by nature and should be left that way, as far as possible.

Later in the month I flew to Reno, Nevada, to attend the annual meeting of the board of trustees of Ducks Unlimited, and also to paint. I think, without a doubt, that this has been one of the best and most instructive moves that I have ever made as far as learning the whole question of wildfowl. Not only were there all the trustees at the meeting, but the biological and other officials of D.U. Canada were present. To use an over-subscribed word, I do not think that I have ever met a bunch of people more dedicated to a job and as high intellect and great company as I had the honour to meet. The amount of time given by all officials, paid and unpaid, of D.U. is quite staggering.

To quote an interesting fact, in Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan the provincial governments have turned all the work of conservation and recreating the marshes over to D.U., and the Canadian government has even gone out of its way as to compulsory purchase land for the benefit of D.U. There are situations, also, when the Canadian government quite often comes in on a 50-50 deal with D.U., but let D.U. run the project. This will just show you to what a position this society has achieved and the recognition given to them for the work of such importance.

Nevada is the sixth biggest state in the union and has a total population of 160,000 people, less than many of the big cities. The government headquarters at Carson City is a small town of 3,000 inhabitants. In fact, most of the people in Nevada live in the four main towns—Reno, Las Vegas, Carson City and Elko. The country is most attractive with its background of high ranges of mountains, coniferous trees and lots of snow. Some of the valleys are very fertile, but most of the country is just mountains and desert with nothing upon mile, upon mile, upon mile. On a 200 mile flight when I left Truckee Valley, one did not see a house or even a desert sage bush. Nevada also boasts one of the biggest marshes in the United States of 200,000 acres of the still water where some staggering good central flyway shooting is gotten, and is also a good breeding ground for Canadian geese, cinnamon teal redheads and ruddy ducks. While I was there I noticed very great numbers of mallard, pintail, wigeon, ruddys, gadwall, greenwing teal—in fact all varieties. Wherever there is water out there there will automatically be wildfowl.

Gun In a Field Trial

While I was there I acted as a gun in a field trial. As I just won jackpot of $150 two hours before at about 6.00 a.m. my shooting of the first eight pigeon was not exactly accurate; but after that I managed to cop. It was an amateur trial of labradors and chesapeakes, young dogs a year and a half old, and apart from the fact that the game was thrown and there were some blind retrieves and that the guns shot side by side, the conditions of trial were very similar to those in Britain. The dog that won was one of the biggest labradors I have seen, with the greatest amount of horse sense I have ever seen in any dog.

After ten days at Reno, I flew direct to Salt Lake City in Utah as the guest of some very great members in D.U. and went down to their marsh on the Bear River which is one of the greatest breeding grounds and wintering grounds for duck and geese in the United States. There is a famous federal fish and wildlife refuge there which is nearest to the Great Salt Lake itself. They are the ones who have the greatest difficulty over the curse of botulism. This is worst in the months of August and September when the water level through evaporation is low. It is when they have the biggest trouble with young duck getting it. It never affects the geese which breed earlier and, another surprise migration, quite often fly up to Canada north before they start coming down again in October. As long as the clubs and fish and wildfire can hold enough fresh water, which is always difficult, this disease can be dealt with, but if one has prolonged hot spells and with the evaporation then they have a party on their hands.

There are three very very famous clubs in the Bear River. One is the Chesapeake which I painted, another is the Duckville and the third is the Bear River but is known as the millionaires' club. I think I saw every variety of duck in these parts and the very big Canada goose. The records incidentally of the geese shot are kept by fish and wildlife refuge (during hunting season 2/5 of refuge is shot). The average weights of the Canada is 11lb. 2oz. which shows that the old giant Canada has not completely disappeared.

The countryside is lovely. One is right in the middle of the Rockies with bags of snow, very delicate coloured marshes, purple sage and all the varieties of gorgeous sunrises and sunsets. The state of Utah is a very interesting one with its tradition of Mormonism. When these people arrived from 110 years ago there was nothing in this state besides water, alkali, desert and mountains. They have turned it where possible into a paradise of orchards and green fields and planted trees everywhere. As far as water and land is concerned, I should say they have done a complete wonder in rehabilitating the country and incidentally helping wild life enormously.

The First Viscount

From Utah, I flew here direct, or at least with stop downs at Denver, Omaha, Chicago and Detroit. As we approached the Cleveland Air Dome what should I see coming out of the north but the first Viscount in service on this side of the Atlantic owned by Trans Canada Airlines. It has been on show here for a week, and, as you know, a few big American airlines are taking it up in a large way.

My work in this area has been mostly trying to finish off various pictures and commissions I have got, and also, of course, to see the very famous Lake Erie marshes of Ohio, mostly between Cleveland and Toledo. Cleveland is without a doubt one of the most attractive cities I have ever been in. Everyone here has rare pride in their houses and there is the most glorious grass, flowers and trees everywhere. The marshes themselves are very lovely with the willows, elms, and cotton wood and the general vegetation being cattails, lotus, lily pads, pickerel weed and what I call smart weed and red grass. The thing that would stagger you here is the number of carp. All along the edges of the water the carp were spawning. We just went in with sticks and hit them over the head. Where there is carp you won't have canvas-back or diving duck, as they just clean any place out of wild celery, rice, and all the other aquatic plants that diving duck will have.

For two days I took part as a gun in a field trial. The first day we shot thrown pheasant (you can shoot that way over here until the last day of April), and the second day we shot pigeons. The dogs were labradors, golden retrievers, and chesapeakes and I am glad to say a lab. won it.

I am now off to Canada and some later time I shall be going to D.U.—Alberta and hope down the Mackenzie River to the Arctic. A report will follow in time. Suffice to say that I could not have been better looked after and I could not be lucky enough to know a nicer bunch of people than those whom I have met on this trip. It has been a pretty circular tour covering vast distances. We worked it out so far that for every painting done I have covered the equivalent of 1,100 miles. Since leaving London Airport I have now done 20,000 miles, which is quite a lot even in these days of travel.

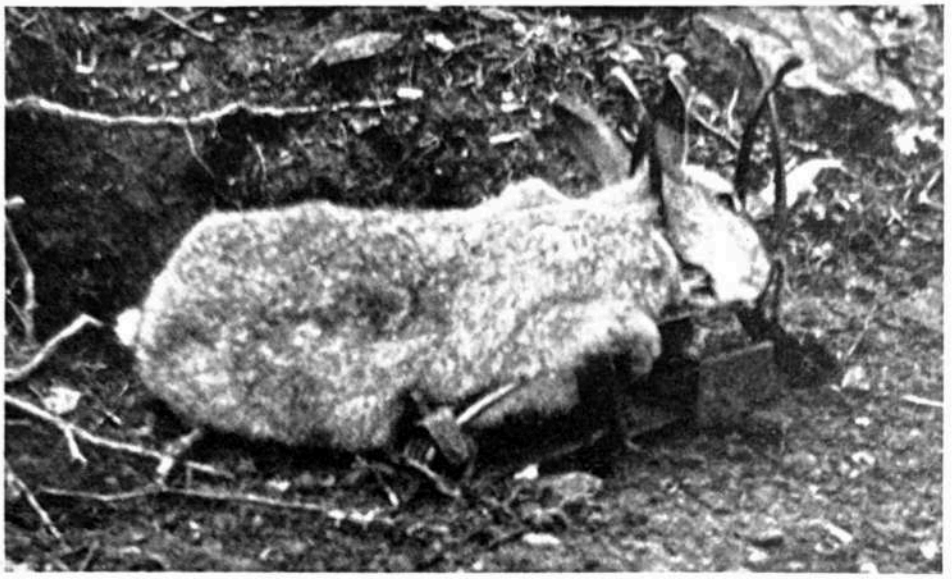
Wildfowling Clubs

Members of The Dorset Wildfowlers' Club learned at their monthly meeting, held at the Red Lion, Poole, on June 23, that that good sportsman and countryman, Lt.-Colonel Sir Thomas Salt, Bart., Deputy Lieutenant of Dorset, had accepted the Presidency of the Club. And more good news was to come when the secretary announced that Sir Thomas Lees, Bart., had done the Club the honour of becoming a Vice-President. Sir Thomas Lees had very long association with Poole Harbour area as landowner and keen sportsman, and was also greatly respected for his county affairs.

General Club business was then discussed. W.A.G.B.I. was now helping the Club obtain various samples of *zostera marina* for limited replanting in the Harbour, and a sub-committee has been formed to deal with this matter. Mr. Chapman, the Harbour engineer and surveyor, was accepted as an hon. member. The committee, after their meeting with the South Dorset Bird-Watching group, were well pleased with the cordial relationship their discussion had fostered. Thanks to a keen member, Mr. P. Pitman, the outing was now agreed upon, this member having been responsible for most of the organisation. Mr. A. Price was enrolled as a member, this being the first occasion on which a new member had been approved by the committee.

A leading article in a local paper was discussed regarding Bird-Watching in Parks, and several members wished to know more of this as the Club had for long advocated that the wildfowlers' general ornithological experience might be put to good service in this direction. All agreed that

(Continued on page 449, col. 3)



Some humane traps will catch, and kill instantly, rabbits, in a limited fashion.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

IF I may be allowed to parody a well-known saying, the gin trap will catch all the rabbits some of the time (particularly in secure enclosures), and some of the rabbits all the time, but it will not catch all the rabbits all the time ; and as far as I can see, no mechanical instrument will ever achieve perfection in this sphere. Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that any other steel trap will surpass the gin for strength, ease of setting, portability, and general efficiency. The simple design proclaims it as a work of art ; but this economy of means was not invented by one man. It was the outcome of trial and error by many manufacturers and trappers over unrecorded generations.

So successful is the basic design, in fact, that it has been incorporated in traps for catching animals ranging in size from mice to lions and tigers. But even in traps for use among the large carnivores the only additional feature is an extra spring to make a more positive lock on the jaws, and to prevent the possibility of accidental release by a heavy animal. As an item of interest, the "Leppan" lion and tiger trap manufactured by a Wednesfield firm has 12in. jaws and a total weight of 30lb. including the chain.

But if the principle of the gin is just about the ultimate in simplicity plus efficiency, it would not be correct to say that all gins are equally reliable. There are good, bad, and indifferent steel traps. The very best, and consequently the most expensive of them, used to be hand-made ; but whether this quality is procurable nowadays I do not know. I am inclined to think, however, that only the traps of unusual size are hand-made. The rest are stamped out by mass-production methods ; but if they are manufactured by a reputable firm, and classed as first-grade, they will give years of good service. Naturally, a third-grade trap from even a reputable firm cannot be expected to last so long, or to maintain its initial efficiency much beyond the first year, although it will be more satisfactory than an article of the same price from a comparatively unknown firm with no reputation to lose.

The Best Traps Pay

I have used all qualities of traps, and I should unhesitatingly recommend first-grade ones from a reputable firm every time, unless the trapper is operating in a district where his tackle is liable to be stolen without warning. Good gins repay the extra cost by bigger catches of rabbits and vermin ; and this desirable end is achieved because they spring faster and grip more positively than the other kind. Apart from considerations of financial loss, ramshackle traps are sprung empty so often that they annoy and discourage the trapper, and make his quarry so wary that they eventually become uncatchable. Which means that a breed of trap-shy rabbits or vermin is evolved in a few generations.

Results of a Cheap Buy

The best gin traps have brass catches and hinges, zinc plates, locked crossbars, and well-tempered springs, because these parts are of special importance. Cheap traps, on the other hand, are made without brass, and the crossbars are merely riveted flat to the stock or "backbone." This joint tends to work loose, so that the eye of the spring may foul the plate, unless the trapper takes care to align the crossbar at right angles to the stock when he is setting a gin with this fault.

Furthermore, the tempering of springs in cheap traps is not given any particular attention, and they become weak in a short time. But even while a cheap trap is able to hold an animal as efficiently as an expensive one (in the first few months of use) its iron catches and hinges are liable to become stiff after prolonged setting, which undoubtedly impairs the chances of a catch. A few years ago I was compelled to accept a consignment of shoddy traps when a reputable firm could not supply my needs in time, and they soon showed other faults as well as the ones that I have already mentioned. Many of the plates fell off because they had not been firmly riveted to the hinges, and the S-hooks were so soft that I could not put any strain on them in case they straightened out. Some of the chain swivels also failed to stand an ordinary strain. As a result of the careless riveting about a dozen of those traps were out of action minus plates before the springs and jaws had begun to deteriorate ; for I simply could not rivet those plates on again to stand active service, although I tried hard to do so. A spot of welding might have been a solution if that means had been available.

Even the finest of traps have a definite life-span, however ; and that time will not be more than four or five years if they are kept in use fairly regularly. The ageing factor is rust, not metal fatigue. Gradually the tiny flakes of oxidized steel scale away from the spring and from the parts where the eye makes contact with the jaws, until the jaws can be pulled slightly asunder when the trap is sprung. This is the beginning of the end. More and more rabbits escape with no greater inconvenience than the loss of a tuft of fleck, although the looseness may not amount to much, and certainly not so much as the diameter of a rabbit's leg. Obviously this apparently insignificant gap between the jaws is just enough to blunt the "bite" when the rabbits are exerting their utmost vigour to escape. And at this stage it is probably true also that the springs are losing some of their resilience from pitting. So the remedy is really another set of tackle.

Ideas of the Layman

The layman is likely to detect in rusty traps some evidence of the trapper's carelessness ; and I was once called in question for this supposed neglect. Only after I had explained to my accuser that greasy or oily traps are practically useless for catching cunning rabbits was he prepared to acquit me without a stain on my character. But his ignorant accusation convinced me that laymen have generally a very vague notion of the trapper's difficulties. Incidentally, I was also asked once by a layman whether I wanted a new consignment of rabbit traps with or without chains!

But excellent though first-grade gin traps may be for making a drastic clearance among rabbits that are living in burrows, they do not kill their victims, excepting some of the very small ones. And this fault threatens to outlaw a valuable instrument completely within the next three years ; so inventors are busy now (I was shown a new design only last week) and have been busy for some time trying to evolve a humane substitute. But up to the present time they are only substitutes, although a few of the models tried out by myself will catch and kill rabbits in a limited fashion.

The obstacles to be overcome by the inventor of a practical humane trap are considerable, and may well be insurmountable. First : The trap must be portable, so that an operator can carry a worthwhile number of them on his back. If portability were not desirable or necessary, we could easily get a humane rabbit trap by setting 30lb. lion gins at burrows. Second : A trap which might be humane to rabbits must not be a menace to unwary human beings or domestic animals, otherwise it has no future. Third : Any rival to the gin must be as easily set as the gin, and it must give approximately as many catches as strikes where conditions are favourable. Fourth : It must not have too much "machinery" to go out of action with rough usage, or to stick or slow up after prolonged setting.

Fifth : It must be equally efficient whether rabbits are entering or emerging from their burrows. I might add here that this has been a stumbling block to many would-be inventors so far. Sixth : It must, if possible, fit into a normal rabbit hole when set ; for even if the law were altered to permit humane traps to be set in the open, the fact remains that rabbits are easier to catch, and traps are easier to set, at the entrances to burrows. Seventh : It must not be too expensive to produce, otherwise it will be stolen more often than the gin has ever been, and it will make trappers so anxious that they will not trap places where the danger of theft is remotely probable. There may be other conditions, but I have enumerated sufficient to show that the inventing of a successful humane trap is not a simple matter.

A Marshland Shoot

by Cervus

SEVERAL years ago, in the capacity of gamekeeper on an estate on the wolds of Lincolnshire, I became acquainted, on a day out with my employer, with a rather unusual shoot in the cultivated marsh country near the coast. Looking back, I can safely say that I have had the happiest days of my career so far on this ground.

I think the charm of the place lies in its informality, certainly not in its beauty, as the flat, drab stretches could in no way compete with the rolling hills of the wolds themselves, the wooded valleys of Wilts and Dorset, or the majestic grandeur of the lonely Pennines, to all of which I had been previously accustomed.

The land was owned and farmed by two brothers, both young men, excellent sportsmen and good shots. It was well keepered by the redoubtable Johnny, who local legend insists was once a poacher but who is, at any rate, an excellent fellow and as keen as they come.

There are no woods in this land of fields and dykes, and all the drives are made from the heavy crops of potatoes, sugar beet, kale, and other root crops produced in the fertile reclaimed marshes. The land is farmed absolutely up to date, which sometimes has clashed with the interests of the game (more of this anon), but is what I call natural game country, both wild pheasants and partridges doing well if the season is in anywise favourable. Hares do very well, too, in this area, but are hardly encouraged on account of their notorious fondness for young sugar beet. Rabbits were kept down well and there is not the quantity of vermin to contend with as one would expect to find in more wooded country.

My first visit stands out very clearly in my memory, when I assisted with the driving and picking-up ; that is, doing a drive, then missing the next if there were any birds left unpicked. It was on this day that my old retriever bitch found her first runners—two partridges. The organisation seemed rather haphazard to my idea ; nevertheless, a good percentage of the game went well over the guns, mostly farmers, some of whom were really good shots.

Most of the drives were fairly long—a good stretch of stubble into a field of cover. It rather surprised me to see the variety of shots the pheasants can provide in such level country. If the guns are so placed to be visible to the oncoming birds, once they had set their course, it is surprising how high they will mount before crossing the line of guns. Johnny always carries a gun on shooting days, and is one of the best keeper-shots I have ever seen It was an unlucky bird which elected to come anywhere within extreme range of his 16-bore, whether breaking back, slipping out at the flank, or curling back grandly over the beaters' heads. Lunch-time was an event always looked forward to, with its accompanying whisky bottle, which went the rounds of the beaters and visiting keepers.

Bag on the First Day

The bag on this first day was a good one—over 60 wild pheasants, over 40 brace of partridges, and over 60 hares, in addition to the usual "various." After helping to count and hang up the game, a most excellent repast was awaiting us in the kitchen, consisting of cold joints of game, ham, various sandwiches, and a grand assortment of cakes, to which my normally gross appetite, sharpened by beating through thick sugar beet and leaping dykes, was, I am pleased to say, able to do full justice.

The next season saw me rearing on my own beat, and one evening, when the job was well under way, I had the pleasure of a visit from Johnny. I was off the field when he arrived, so until I put in an appearance, he, who had never reared pheasants, plied my assistant on duty with questions about the art, which the young fellow was able to answer. Johnny was determined to rear himself the following spring.

That season when I visited Johnny's ground, we had another good shoot, the figures for pheasant and partridges being reversed, compared with the corresponding day the previous season. It was in this year that the bitch I have really came into her own, proving first-class on runners and achieving quite a reputation in that part of Lincolnshire.

The following season Johnny did rear on a small scale, using surplus wild pheasants' eggs. I believe that, for a first attempt, he was quite successful, and planned to do bigger things in the following year.

The bag of pheasants on the principal day was up to a 100, and partridges were down to 18 brace, although I believe a better bag of the latter was made later that year, and several pheasants were walked-up every week-end by Johnny and his two employers on the boundary dykes.

The next year I was able to assist Johnny on four days, the best of which yielded 122 pheasants, another 111 pheasants, the other two being smaller days at cocks only. The partridge bags still remained low, which rather perplexed me, although an amusing in-

(Continued on page 454, col. 2)

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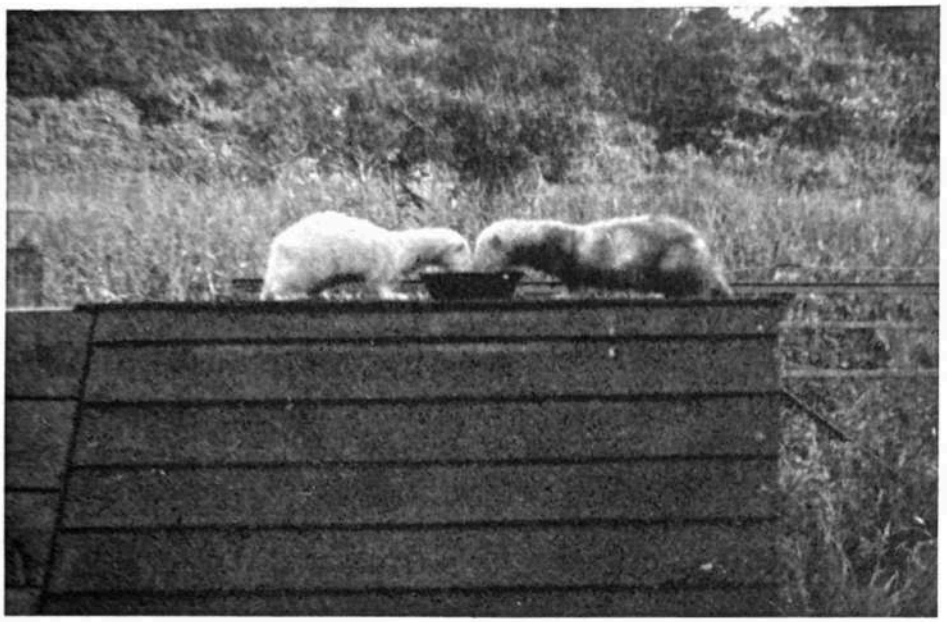

Rooftop refreshment. An old fold unit, properly secured, makes good quarters.

The Young Shot

Trouble Afoot

by Petrel

WHETHER octogenarians should be permitted to drive motor cars without being submitted to periodic tests of efficiency, or whether, indeed, they should be allowed to drive at all, has nothing to do with the case. All I know is that had it not been for one of these veterans I would have been in bed an hour earlier last night, and would have slept a deal less fitfully.

It was almost dark when he drove up, and I opened the garage doors for him, to save his ancient legs. We talked for a minute or two and quite casually and as an afterthought he said, "There was some strange little animal chasing my dog in front of the house just now. Couldn't see what it was, but it looked like a weasel." In a flash suspicions were aroused, "Goodnight," I said, and bolted. Seconds later they were confirmed.

My pair of ferrets, almost pensioned off save for the occasional ratting foray, are living out their retirement in the palatial premises of a spare fold unit. No one seems to be able to understand why I do not knock them on the head in these rabbitless days, but as they cost nothing to feed, unless one counts the price of a cartridge expended on some vermin bird, and since their movable establishment never needs cleaning, they are no trouble. And while one dare not hope that rabbits will make a comeback in sufficient numbers to justify their full employment again, there is always that faint possibility that they might turn out to be a good investment, for the ferret population of these islands must now be at a very low level Strangely enough and fortunately too, although never separated, my ferrets failed to breed this year.

Two Courses of Action

The door their run is heavy and, I thought, immovable, but for good measure was always wedged tightly shut with a strong stick. But one glance was enough to disclose that someone or something had dislodged that stick and that the jill was now the sole occupant of the hutch. Somewhere in the darkness a powerful hob ferret was at large, and with a poultry farm 200 yards away, it was painfully easy to guess where he would turn up.

There are two courses of action open in such an emergency. Forthwith and without delay you can warn your neighbours of your loss so that they are prepared for trouble in the hen run. This you should do, and if they are good neighbours and are unlucky enough to lose a bird or two their retribution is unlikely to be harsh. At the same time you must be prepared to offer to pay for any losses. If you do have to pay, you may claim the bird, or birds, and it is as well to make certain that the victims have in fact been killed by the ferret!

Alternatively you can keep quiet and say nothing, disclaiming all knowledge or ownership of the escapee. In this case you will certainly not get your ferret back and almost equally certainly the true facts will leak out, with unpleasant consequences. It is as well to be honest at the beginning.

On this occasion, however, as it was late, I did nothing, beyond satisfying myself that my own cockerel run was impregnable and abandoned a hopeless search when it started to rain.

Next morning I found that the stick, replaced the night before, had again been dislodged from the fold unit door, but there was no other sign that the wanderer might have returned. I walked on to feed the cockerels, and looking back saw the very bedraggled hob following me up the path. He had returned to the fold and must have spent a miserable night trying to find an entrance. At least he had saved me more anxiety and several telephone calls. I have now put a strong bolt on that door.

Trained Martens

Had I the patience and powers of Mr. Hurrell, the trouble would never have arisen. A distinguished contemporary records that this Devon naturalist has trained a troop of pine martens to come to heel at the sound of a hawk's bell, and that one of them even goes rabbiting with its master. (Shades of my old German short-haired pointer, which would only come to heel at a toot on a horn annexed from a Brussels tram-conductor). If it is possible to train a shy creature like a marten to such a high degree, it should be possible to train a ferret, which has always been a domesticated species, to even greater heights. The Greeks kept tame polecats for catching rats and mice and the Romans are said to have done the same. The latter also were the first to introduce ferrets to this country.

I have yet to hear of anyone who has successfully trained a stoat to work like a ferret, and, of course, the two breeds would never work together, for a ferret will aways fight and get the better of a stoat.

No Revival

I thought for a moment last week that we were about to see a revival of rabbits on the bracken-clad slopes of the Old Warren. Half-a-dozen half-grown young ones I saw, and on a second visit the long-dog brought one to hand, a sleek, plump specimen bearing no signs of pestilence. Then on the following evening we came across the freshly killed body of a full grown doe with a small puncture just behind the ears and eyes puffy in the first stages of myxomatosis, so it looks as if the disease is breaking out again. Looking through an old history of the parish, I came across the following, referring to this once productive warren:

"The lease was to be for seven years and during that term a yearly rent was to be paid of twenty and five cupples of large good and sweet cunnies weekly or otherwise when and as often as the said Samuel Brightwell shall have occasion for them and shall demand them at his own dwelling house and the said Humfry Marsh shall begin to make payment of so many cunnies as the said Samuel Brightwell shall have occasion for every year during the said terme between Midsomer and Candlemas and shall deliver from time to time the said rent of cunnies at the dwelling house of the said Samuel Brightwell situate in P———."

In other words, as many rabbits as the Lord of the Manor should require at any time. Hey-days, palmy days indeed, which might have lasted under the same conditions until just over a year ago. At the end of his tenancy, the tenant was bound to hand over the warren in good order and well stocked with at least two dozen cunnies (incidentally, I have never seen this spelling before). Today he would have a job to produce two of them.

Wildfowling Clubs

(Continued from page 446)

members from pigeon clubs and similar bodies be invited to a meeting for the discussion and views on the Government proposed extermination of woodpigeon by the use of narcotics, and that if legislation was evident at a future time, that a combined effort be made to prevent this chemical warfare becoming as detrimental and disastrous to bird life as myxomatosis had been to the rabbit.

During the coming season, all members are to undertake a W.A.G.B.I. bird census of birds observed on their individual forays, so that the Club would have its own local records as well as national information on bird movement.

* * *

Will all Cornish sportsmen please note that there will be an inaugural meeting at the Barley Sheaf Hall, Bodmin (the Hall is situated directly behind the Barley Sheaf Inn) on July 30, at 6.30 p.m. to discuss the formation of a wildfowling club for the county. It is hoped that as many good sportsmen as possible will turn up, for the importance of forming this club cannot be over-emphasised, as will have been noted in the article by "Tower-Bird" ("Another Call To Arms") in last week's issue. A letter will appear in next week's issue to remind readers of the urgency of this appeal. Further details from Mr. Richard W. Hawken, 15 St. Leonard's, Bodmin, Cornwall.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

NARCOTICS FOR PIGEON

Sir,—On the subject of the attempt being made to destroy the pigeon population by narcotics, readers of *The Shooting Times* may be interested to hear the following.

Late last April a man from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries research department came down to a nearby farm. He spent all of one day carefully putting down doped peas on a field which had just been drilled.

The whole of the following day, from early morning to late evening, he spent watching the pigeon feeding. Not one pigeon seemed to be any the worse when it flew away and our gamekeeper, who by the way can recite a great deal of Shakespeare and Shelley, said that he had not seen any pigeon suffering from after effects.

I do not think, therefore, that the "narcotics scare," if I may call it such, is anything to be worried about at present. However, I am, to quote Mr. Muspratt of Tunbridge Wells (issue June 10) "quite disgusted with the idea."

P. J. RICE,
Dane Court, Tilmanstone,
Deal, Kent.

THE MENACE WITH A GUN

Sir,—"Tower-Bird's" article entitled as above spotlights a bigger danger to the future of shooting in these islands than anti-sport opinion, and that is not inconsiderable at the present time. But how to combat such a state of affairs?

No responsible sportsman, whether inland or coastwise, can afford to ignore the problem so adequately dealt with by "T.-B.," but can it be rectified on the lines suggested? Personally, I doubt it. It might be reduced, but never eliminated under the present set-up. And so long as it is allowed to continue anti-sport outlook is likely to increase. I have always felt that shooting as a sport required drastic organisation if it was to stand in this age of ultra organisation; and until this is effected no shooter will be able to look to the future with any degree of confidence.

I am fully aware of the difficulties the building up of an adequate body capable of putting shooting on a sound footing faces, but I refuse to believe it impossible. Already there are a number of shooting men banded together in an attempt to safeguard and improve their various interests—the wildfowlers. These, very naturally, concern themselves with their own particular branch of shooting and achieve commendable results. But think what those results would be if all men wishing to shoot were first to become a member of one of these associations *by law* before obtaining a license. And think what could be possible by welding all these existing clubs into one vast combination capable of being heard in Westminster.

The "types" mentioned by "T.B.," and there are far too many, could very quickly be dealt with effectively by their failure to obtain a licence after a proved offence against sporting codes laid down by the suggested body. Perhaps I have put the cart before the horse, but the result of bringing together various shooting interests into one administrative association could provide the strength and finance to put shooting and the welfare of birds and beasts of the field concerned on a sure footing fully recognised by Parliament.

This is not the first time I have attempted to draw attention to the possibilities of such a scheme, and once again it is probable that the apathy of the average shooting man will dismiss it. But until I read that *The Shooting Times* has become the official organ of an all-embracing shooting organisation capable of controlling by law the welfare of shooting I refuse to believe any particular problem facing us to-day will be effectively solved with any degree of permanency. And I shall continue at every opportunity to plug it—editors permitting.

WARM BARRELS,
Northants.

FIRST BROADCAST OF CLAY PIGEON SHOOT

Sir,—In your issue for July 1 there appeared a letter, "Recording of Clay Pigeon Shoot," from Mr. A. E. Johnson, who said: "I stand to be corrected, when I say this is the first clay pigeon shooting competition in the Midlands to interest the B.B.C. sufficiently to send along a recording car, with a view to broadcast."

I hope Mr. Johnson does not mind if I do correct him on this point, for the B.B.C. have previously made such a broadcast. It was on May 18, 1937, when there was a broadcast at 6.30 p.m. in the Midland Regional programme of part of the Coronation Shoot held at Stratford-upon-Avon.

I also enclose a cutting for the *Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph* which may be of interest for publication should space permit.

P.A.D.,
Northants.

[Thank you for the cutting, extracts from which are printed below.—Ed.]

Northamptonshire branch of the National Farmers' Union has asked their headquarters to seek legislation to make the release of healthy rabbits in areas de-populated by myxomatosis illegal. A report on the situation was made by Mr. H. W. T. Beckett, the secretary, at a meeting of the county executive committee on Saturday. At the last meeting of the committee, Mr. W. J. Chamberlain referred to offers of £1 for healthy rabbits and was told that, while action could be taken if there was any deliberate re-infestation of a designated clearance area, it was doubtful if any legal action could be taken in other cases. It was also stated that it was the Ministry of Agriculture's intention to make a clearance area all over the country. At Kettering, they are particularly worried about pigeons. And on the proposition of Mr. A. M. Carling, the committee decided that "in view of the increase in the pigeon population in the country, this branch urges headquarters to press as a matter of urgency for the introduction of methods for dealing with the pigeon population on a large scale."

SHOOTING NEAR THE HIGHWAY

Sir,—With reference to Mr. F. M. Boyces' letter regarding the above in your issue for June 24, I would hasten to point out, in case any of your readers obtain a false impression of the law on this subject, that the distance is *not* 40 feet as stated, and there need *not* be any injury or damage, in order to constitute an offence.

The Act governing this is the Highways Act of 1835, Section 72, and I quote from Stone's Justices' Manual: "If any person shall wantonly fire off any gun or pistol, within *fifty* feet of the centre of any carriage way or cartway, to the injury of such highway, or to the *injury, interruption or personal danger* of any person travelling thereon" (the italics are my own) that person commits an offence. No elaboration is needed.

R. TWEDDLE,
Longtown, Cumberland.

["Woodman" writes: "I agree with Mr. Tweddle on his first point; the material distance is "within fifty feet of the centre of the carriage way." I disagree with him on his second point. In three cases, all on this very point, local benches of justices had taken the law as being as Mr. Tweddle suggests. In each instance they were overruled by the High Court on appeal. In these three decisions the judges made it clear that in order for a prosecution under Sec: 72 to succeed, it is essential that it be proved affirmatively that both: (1) A gun was purposely fired within fifty feet of the centre of the carriage way; (2) Either, (a) the surface of the highway was thereby damaged, or (b) injury, or interruption, or personal danger was thereby caused to someone travelling on the highway. There is a note to the passage in Stone's Justices Manual quoted by Mr. Tweddle. It is intended to be read in conjunction with the text and calls attention to the decision in Lees v. Stone, 1919, 83JP, 163KBD, it explains the whole cause. This case, together with the two others was fully explained in an article in *The Shooting Times* on July 16, 1954, and also previously on April 23, 1949."—Ed.]

FOREIGN GUNS

Sir,—So it has been left to Mr. B. P. Moss of Chester to pull the skeleton out of the cupboard! Here, in Ireland, nine guns out of ten on the trap lines are Continental automatics and over-and-unders. They are thoroughly reliable and give 100 per cent satisfaction and they are precision-built and they do not have to be returned to the makers for periodic overhaul and precision-built spare parts drop into place without expert fitting, should a smash occur through accident. Why is this? Because Continental manufacturers look forward to 1980 and do not cast nostalgic glances over their shoulders at 1890.

Once upon a time there was a London watch. Once upon a time there was a Sheffield razor. Where are they now? Self praise and a "crab all progress" attitude to any new method were also reflected in Kipling's monkeys . . . "We are the cleverest people . . . we all say so so it must be true." I see no English reports of the latest "double automatic" gun which is going to embarrass the light side-by-side double if it attains anything like the popularity of the over-and-under. These things will have to be faced if the British gun is not going to descend into oblivion. There is room for a precision-built side-by-side but the market will not wait for ever.

A. V. G. PADDON,
Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

[We publish extracts from our correspondent's letter because we consider that everyone is entitled to his own opinions. We consider, however, that he makes sweeping statements. The British gun is still the best and it is certainly not going to "descend into oblivion!"—Ed.]

Irish team members at the firing point at the International Clay Pigeon Shooting Tournament at Collinstown, Dublin. L. to R.: Messrs. Nixon, Davidson, Kelly, Moran, and Mullan. *(See report of meeting on page 444.)*

COVENTRY AND DISTRICT DOG AND GUN CLUB

Sir,—You were no doubt waiting to receive the results of the Warwickshire Down - the - Line Championship arranged by this club to be competed for on June 25 last. However, the committee called off the competition, due to the very poor attendance, and permission has now been granted from the C.P.S.A. to hold it on August 13 next, starting at 2.0 p.m.

This will cancel the proposed Midlands Down - the - Line championship which we cannot, in any case, hold as arranged for August 13.

GILBERT J. DAVIES,
Hon. Secretary, 56 Arnold Avenue, Coventry.

ORGANISED PIGEON SHOOTING

Sir,—I have taken in your grand journal since 1947 and would like to express my opinion on organised pigeon shooting as described by Mr. J. Wheater (issue May 6) who many of us young shots do not know, although we have read of his high standard of shooting.

Mr. Wheater is correct that the best way of getting big bags of pigeon is by shooting over decoys when they are flighting in to do the damage, and not after the damage is done. He stated that he shot 1,200 in 13 days.

Mr. Stokes, in reply (issue May 20), told him to get off his high horse, and says: "Do not deny the 'Toms, Dicks, and Harrys' their 25 cartridges a week (cheap ones), because some day they may have the pleasure of having their name on one of the trophies."

But, Mr. Stokes, we "Toms, Dicks, and Harrys" will have to shoot 225 cartridges a week for years (repeat years) before we could achieve the ambition of all young shots; and

those 225 cartridges to be shot at clay pigeons. One gets no trophy for wood-pigeon shooting. My whole interest in life is shooting and we all have to learn the art the hard way. Nobody taught me. I could write a book on my own disappointments during learning. We cannot all have full purses.

Mr. Stokes, therefore, is getting away from the point. Mr. Wheater has worked very hard to reach his present efficiency. I, myself, have cleaned gutters, thinned turnips, scattered muck, and all just to make an extra shilling or two to be able to afford the expensive sport of clay pigeon shooting.

I consider that Mr. Wheater is doing a grand job of work shooting thousands of pigeon. He has to practice like all the top-flight pigeon shooters who shoot for our country.

As for cheap cartridges, I have shot a few, but I shall not do so again. If you want to shoot your best, use the best cartridges.

I do not know Mr. Stokes, or Mr. Wheafer, but I wish them, yourself and your staff, and all shooting men wherever they be, good sport.

DONALD MCNEIL,
Wigton, Cumberland.

[This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.]

THE LAST HUNT

Sir,—Your very thoughtful editorial on a "Contemporary Problem" has coincided with my reading of "The Last Hunt" by Milton Lott—a work I can hardly describe without exhausting superlatives. I think I can do no better than to quote the song of the buffalo-skinner:

It's now we've crossed Peace River, boys, our troubles have begun,
The first dam hide I went to rip, Gosh! how I cut my thumb.
While skinning the damned old stinker our lives didn't stand a show,
For the Indians watched to pick us off while skinning the buffalo.
Our meat was always buffalo rump and iron wedge bread,
And all we had to sleep on was a buffalo robe for a bed.
The fleas and the grey backs worked on us, oh boys it was not slow
I'll tell you there's no worse hell on earth than the range of the buffalo!

It were almost invidious to compare African conditions with *these*. The buffalo and bison (or "wisent") are of course two entirely different genera. I am inclined to think that the bison of Europe and North America was perhaps the more interesting animal of the two (though the extinct aurochs or wild ox must have been the most interesting of all). There can, however, be no doubt that the Asiatic and African buffalos (especially the latter) are far more thrilling to hunt. The buffalo and leopard are the only two animals that cannot be turned aside once they have begun to charge.

My "last buffalo hunt" was on the Sabi river (Portuguese Mozambique) in 1941, in company with Mr. and Mrs. Tony Banning and their son Freddie. Unlike the Peace River outfit, we lived like lords with dozens of African natives to skin for us in exchange for the meat. I enclose a photo of our camp cook which I hope you can publish. She is sitting on a young buffalo shot for the larder. Not only did Barbara Banning yield nothing in appearance to the heroine of a Western film but she was the best "buffalo cook" (bar none) that ever lived. In a country where meat tends to be tough, her buffalo steaks were indistinguishable from prime English beef, and her antelope steaks actually *superior* to the finest flavoured south down mutton.

The Portuguese District officers (at all events in that time and place) were charming fellows who used to bring their "senoras" (wives) and their mandolins to help us out in our singing of Western songs round the camp fire in the evening. "Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam ..." (unfortunately we did not know the "Peace River" anthem in those days!) One wonders if these nostalgic days will ever return?

John Taylor, hunter, author and (British) ivory poacher, says that even pre-war there was far more spirit of "live and let live" in the Portuguese possessions. One wonders what they are like now For if, today, one tried to stage one's "Last Hunt" in *British* Colonial territory with its ignorant, bullying little white bureaucrats and murderous Mau-Mau tribes, I think the "Peace River" incident would be quite outclassed. I visualise that the "Last Hunt" would finish up in something far more like "Custer's Last Fight." *Those* were the days!

Noted for her buffalo and antelope steaks—Mrs. Barbara Banning sitting on a young buffalo shot for the larder. (See letter "The Last Hunt.")

The scene of my "last hunt" in 1941 was where Major Bosman shot the world's African record buffalo in 1937—60 inch beam. I believe he was quite a new hand at the game. He was killed by a buffalo the following season (on the Portuguese Limpops, I believe).

Now I hear that the American, Mr. Warren Page, is credited with having shot the world's record Asiatic buffalo *on his first trip*. It sounds incredible (considering that British and Asiatic skikaris have been trying for at least a century). Everything to do with buffalo and bison must seem incredible to the uniniated (which includes the post-war Game Department official) e.g., the numbers of bison that were found in North America. In Africa I do not believe the herds often exceed 200 animals today (i.e., since the rhinderpest). The largest herd I have seen I should estimate at about 150.

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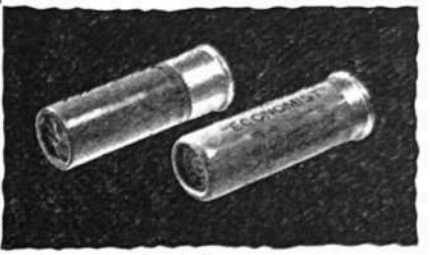

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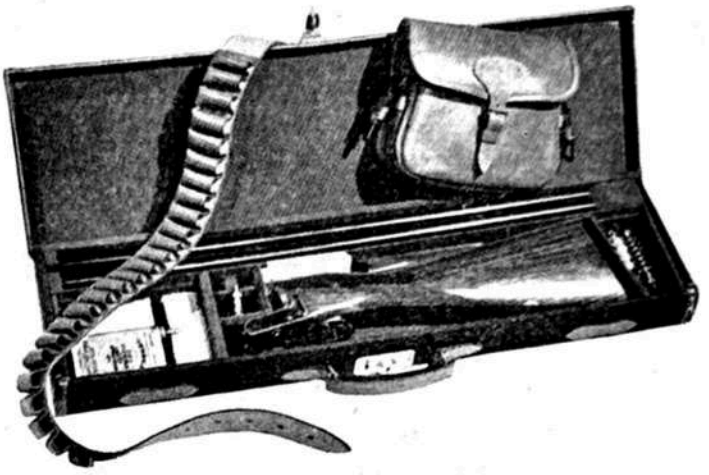

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

THESE days I am continually receiving letters from readers bemoaning the lack of rabbits from the training point of view. Myxomatosis has certainly made things very difficult, and nobody realises this better than the professional gundog trainer. Here we are, in the middle of the busiest part of the year for training, and hardly any of us have rabbits upon which to train the young dogs. It is all very well to have a few tame rabbits in a pen, but what is needed are rabbits in the wild state—in the woods and fields so that a certain amount of genuine field experience can be given.

Not only does this dearth of rabbits make retrieving practice difficult, but it seriously hinders the training of young spaniels and other dogs to quest, there being no scent lying about. It is also difficult to teach dogs to be steady without the ubiquitous rabbit, and few of us have felt inclined to ruin the pheasant nesting season by working dogs on game birds during the spring and early summer, even if we have been fortunate enough to have pheasant coverts at our disposal.

In my own case, I have one spaniel which is very reluctant to hunt, and a spaniel and a labrador which refuse to retrieve anything but the real thing. This means, therefore, that to do my job properly I should have to give the non-hunter plenty of practice on rabbits in the woods, and to shoot plenty of rabbits for use with the dogs which will not touch the dummy.

Jealousy will often induce a dog to retrieve.

Although we all make as much use as we can of vermin birds and pigeon, they are not always available (especially in a well-keepered district), and pigeon are not ideal subjects upon which to practise young dogs retrieving. Apart from this, many dogs will refuse to lift magpies, jays and other vermin until they have had plenty of retrieving experience—experience on the real thing, by which I mean rabbits. Few dogs will refuse to lift a rabbit, unless they have been too severely checked on them in the pen or fields, and most trainers, amateur and professional, use a rabbit skin dummy for a start which makes dogs more eager to retrieve something furry. It may be possible to do a good deal of steadying upon hares in certain districts, but hares are not available in quantity to us all, and in any event they are too bulky for much early retrieving experience and no genuine sportsman would shoot an unlimited number of hares for dog work during the breeding season.

Results of Myxomatosis

I regret that I cannot offer readers a complete solution to the problem which myxomatosis has set those of us interested in gundog training. Now, more than ever, the "artificial" rabbit-pen is valuable, and the trainer must just try to have on hand as many tame rabbits as possible, taking every precaution to guard them against the disease by inoculation (in which I have little faith), dusting with insect powder (to keep them free of the virus carrying flea), and trying to arrange for a hefty breeding programme with his tame stock. Rabbits are needed not only for making dogs hunt and for steadying them, but for retrieving as well, and so we have to sacrifice some of our stock to this end from time to time. It all boils down to more work, more worry and—we must face it—a longer training course for dogs in those areas where there are hardly any rabbits.

I mentioned above dogs which will not lift dummies, but which will retrieve the real thing willingly. They are always a problem, for it is very unlikely that there will always be birds (or rabbits) ready to hand with which to practice them, and in any case it is not a good thing to give a dog the same game specimen to retrieve more than once or twice. It is well nigh impossible to teach these dogs all the different retrieves which we wish them to learn without making use of a dummy, and yet I hate having to force a dog which obviously has a natural instinct for retrieving the real thing. If a dog refuses to lift anything it is a different matter—you have either got to force it or discard it, but these in-betweens are special cases, and must be treated accordingly. I have many times stressed my objections to force retrieving (how I hate that term !), the chief one being that, in my experience, the forced dog never retrieves so happily or with such style as the natural performer.

Late Starting to Retrieve

Of course, some dogs never take kindly to retrieving until they are of quite advanced age—a keeper friend of mine says he never gives up a spaniel as hopeless in this respect until it is over two years old. Just the same thing applies to questing, and I have known several spaniels which never really hunted cover until they were two years old or thereabouts. It is one thing for the owner-trainer to wait patiently for his dog to develop, but it is quite another for the owner who is having his dog professionally trained for a weekly fee to have to wait months, maybe a year or more, before he sees results. That is unless he is exceptionally keen, very fond of the particular dog and, above all, well endowed with worldly goods. Some dogs are so promising in other respects that it pays to give them every chance to make up in any respect in which they may be lacking.

I was talking a few days ago to a man who used to do a lot of gundog training years ago.

Life Has Speeded Up . . .

Although an amateur, for years he was very successful at field trials with both spaniels and retrievers, in what many people term the hey-day of trials. In the shooting field his dogs had very high reputations and many of the older sportsmen locally still talk about them and hold them up as good examples of what dogs should be able to do. I asked Mr. S (as I will call him) what he thought about present-day trial dogs, and of training generally. He was most emphatic on one point—that nowadays we expect too much from our dogs too young and too quickly. "Life has speeded up," he said, "and I suppose people expect to be able to speed up dog training as well. In my opinion, this is quite wrong and, in very many cases, well nigh impossible. Dogs take a long time to develop, and you cannot train a dog in four or six months to do all that is required of a really stiff trial or, for that matter, at a heavy day's shooting."

Mr. S went on to say that he supposed it was mostly a question of money these days. Owners wished to get a good dog for the least possible outlay, and this, in his opinion, is a very short sighted policy. If you hurry a gundog in its training you are bound to be disappointed, and where the time factor is uppermost in the trainer's mind he is most likely to push a dog on to fresh work before it has mastered the all-important early training. Mr. S seldom started a retriever before it was nine months of age, and a spaniel not much earlier. This, he said, was because he believed in letting the dog develop, physically and mentally, before being called upon to undergo what is, after all, a very great strain on both its mind and body. He did stress, however, that in his training days there was more time and money was not a very important factor in his case and, of course, much more game was available.

Not that Mr. S believed in letting his dogs run riot before serious training commenced. He believed in keeping them in kennel, but giving them ample personal attention, always exercising them himself even if he could not do the feeding. (It is interesting to note that another famous trainer, the late Col. G. H. Badcock, was most emphatic that the trainer should give his pupils their free-running exercise, considering that it mattered not at all who fed them.) Young spaniels were encouraged to quest and gallop about over ground whereon game had been but was no longer present—in his case this was the park in front of his house which he used to religiously "drive in" with older dogs before exercising the youngsters first thing in the morning.

Retrievers and spaniels were never exercised together because he believed that the wider ranging retrievers tended to make the spaniels get out of range and implant the wrong idea. "I only taught my dogs two things before they were eight months of age," Mr. S told me. "These were to come in to name and whistle,

and to kennel up when told. If a dog did unfortunately find a bird or rabbit and give chase it was never punished, but I did all I could to get it back to me as quickly as possible, to restrain the other dogs from following its bad example, and then getting them all back into kennel as quickly as possible." All his dogs were early accustomed to gunfire, the kennels being behind the house near the kitchen garden which was "infested with rabbits," and wherein gardeners and Mr. S himself used to spend a good deal of time potting them with small-bore shotguns.

Mr S is fully aware that few, if any, people have the advantages that he had for dog training, but he is still convinced that much better results would be achieved if most trainers, amateur as well as professional, were less intensive with their training and gave their dogs time to develop before starting serious work.

I asked Mr. S if he used dummies, or if he relied upon the real thing for retrieving practice from the start. His answer was rather surprising, for the only dummy he ever used was the brush with which the dogs were groomed which, he said, always proved attractive to the puppies even from the early days when they were too small to carry it properly. "I never had a dog, spaniel or retriever, which refused to retrieve the brush," he told me "and only a few dogs gave trouble about lifting the real thing when the time came for them to do so. I almost always started my dogs on rabbits, and if they were reluctant to pick one up I would encase the brush in a fresh rabbit's skin and use that as a dummy. It seldom failed, and I always used to have my rabbits skinned properly no cutting off of head or tail. Therefore the skins I used were to all intents and purposes just like a natural rabbit, stuffed with a brush, and I could never reason out why the scent from the fresh skin did not completely mask that of the brush. However, it obviously did not, for the dogs would lift it and after a few retrieves of it would lift a rabbit with confidence."

In the case of reluctance to retrieve birds, the brush would be adorned with wing and tail feathers from a cock pheasant with, apparently, the same happy results. Mr. S was emphatic on one point—that dogs in his training days were tougher and bolder and far less liable to be temperamental than they are now. "But," he qualified this by saying, "I believe that you people bring about a lot of this temperament yourselves by being too intensive too quickly, taking on more dogs than you can comfortably manage at one time, and by breeding regardless of blood lines and, in general, putting the financial aspect first." In all of which there may be a good deal of truth.

I feel sure Mr. S will not mind me pointing out here, as I did during our chat, that things are, unfortunately, vastly different from what they were in his day. As he so rightly said, life is conducted as much greater pace, and competition is keener. The financial aspect must, for most of us, take a very important place and, as I stressed in a recent article, game is not nearly so abundant as it was 40 or 50 years ago, or even before World War II, for that matter. More and more people are taking an interest in gundogs and training, and for the most part they are people with limited means and opportunities. This I consider to be a good thing for gundogs generally, but it does, of course, mean that many things will have to be done on a much more economical scale than they used to be, and that trials, being difficult to arrange and to attend, may sometimes not be as high a standard as might be desired.

However, Mr. S pleased me when he finished up our chat by saying quite definitely that he considered the top dogs of the trial world of today fully equal to, if not better than, the top dogs of his day. "What saddens me," he concluded, "is the thought of the many dogs which must fall by the wayside under present day intensive methods of training, and how much better most dogs would be if only their owners and trainers had the opportunities and advantages that I did and if they would, above all, take on fewer dogs and train them more slowly and thoroughly, and start them later than they appear to do now."

Air-Guns and Air-Pistols

(Continued from page 445)

one of special appeal to the collector and historian.

Thus the book continues, bringing light to bear upon what are to many air-gun users unknown places. There is no question but that there is a great deal to this subject—that it is in fact one to which justice can only be done by means of a fair-sized volume. The author has performed a service to old and young alike by putting between two covers such a store of information and experience. There are, for example, chapters on blowpipes, a repeating air-rifle of 1792, walking-stick pneumatic rifles and guns, spring-operated air-rifles, spring-operated air-pistols, modern pneumatic rifles, pneumatic pistols, gas-rifles, modern gas-pistols, an air-operated machine gun, bullets, pellets, calibres and sights, and much more. Enough to keep the schoolboy busy until he passes into the great world, and much more. Indeed there is plenty in this book for everyone who shoots irrespective of age.

But let it not be thought that the contemporary day-by-day question and problems of the air-gun shooter have been in any way neglected or skimmed-over. From personal experience I have a pretty good idea of what the air-gun user wants to know or to do. And all these questions are well-catered-for in such further chapters as air-rifles and the law, garden ranges and targets, air-rifle clubs, buying and selling an air rifle, care, maintenance and repair. And for those of a ballistic kind of mind there is a table of approximate muzzle velocities and various other data.

This book, which is a mine of information (and surprising information much of it is too) on a fascinating subject will assuredly become a classic of its kind. However, as my space is running out, I will just quote a few do's and dont's which are included (and wisely so) in it: Do take adequate precautions when handling or using an air-gun or pistol. Do remember to buy a gun licence if you intend to carry or use your weapon away from your own house or grounds. Do make certain your weapon is not cocked or loaded before putting it aside. Don't lend your air weapon to anyone unless you are positive they can be safely trusted with it. Don't discharge a spring-operated air weapon without first loading it with a pellet, or serious internal damage may result.

A Marshland Shoot

(Continued from page 448)

cident occurred connected with these latter on the best day of the year.

It is rather surprising how, once the sprayer has departed, pheasants will still frequent a potato field which has had the haulms burnt up by sulphuric acid, despite the strong chemical smell which persists in the area, and apparently suffer no ill effects and do, in fact, flush quite well from such a field. However, we were driving such a potato field, parallel to the boundary against wihch it was situated. It is no exaggeration to say the pheasants were going forward in "coveys," when the owner of the next estate, a rather elderly gentleman, appeared about one field away from the drive, on his own ground. At the sound of the shooting, his old dog, which accompanied him, ran amok and put up three good coveys of partridges, which crossed the boundary fence in front of the beaters and went beautifully over the guns, several of them falling. The dog then appeared, ran to the fall of a cock pheasant, seized it, and tore off in triumph back over the boundary fence to his master.

I left the district at the end of that season, promising to return the following year for a day if I could possibly manage it. Late October found me there again. Apparently both wild and hand-reared pheasants had done marvellously well that year and by late summer the tame birds had been "moved to cover"—as opposed to moved to covert, there being no coverts. Several were in a bean field, always a favourite place for young pheasants when the beans were attacked by fly. The choice was a straight one, beans or pheasants and farming being the business and pheasants the sport—beans it had to be. The crop was sprayed with some toxic insecticide and over a 100 pheasants were picked up dead.

After being warmly welcomed by Johnny's employer, the elder of the two brothers, Johnny handed me his gun and a handful of cartridges—an honour indeed.

A Gallery Shot

The last drive before lunch, we took a piece of sugar beet out and birds went forward well. Almost at the end of the drive, three partridges broke back over my head and I was pleased to be able to treat the whole company of guns and beaters to a right-and-left. Two dogs besides my own unsuccessfully hunted for the birds, the beet being very thick, the day warm and the dogs tired. The rest went to lunch, but I stayed back and soon found both birds stone dead.

Later that afternoon, I missed a beautiful shot at an approaching partridge, hurrying down the beating line. Before I could use the second barrel, the boss, walking next to me, fetched it down and politely raised his hat.

That day we killed over 100 pheasants, but only 15 brace of partridges. It was then that I formed a theory. Johnny has various other jobs to do apart from keepering so with the added work of rearing, it would be impossible to expect him to do full duty to the partridges by finding all the nests he could. Therefore, I believe that as the stocks of pheasant have risen, they have spoiled an increasing number of partridge nests by laying their eggs therein, causing the original owners to desert the nests. Of course, if the nests are unsupervised a very large proportion of the nests would be spoiled in this manner, considering that there are no woods to draw the pheasants attention from the habitat of the partridges at any time. They can be a big enough nuisance on a partridge beat when suitable coverts are not available for their nesting.

Johnny said it was a pity I could not have managed to get over for the second shoot, as he seemed quite confident that there really would be plenty of game that day. However, my wife did stay for it. Pheasants were there in hundreds, going over the guns, behind the beaters, and out at the flanks "in clouds." Only single guns were used. The bag, without the pick-up, was 297 pheasants.

Some keepers, more experienced than Johnny, would still say that the ground was only half keepered. Be that as it may, I am still wondering how he did it.

NEW BOOKS

Guns and Shooting, by Lucian Cary (Arco Publishing Company Ltd., 10 Fitzroy Street, London, W.1, 15s.). Mr. Lucian Cary, the author, is the gun editor of *Tone Magazine* and he knows his guns and shooting as well as any other expert. Moreover he is an excellent writer and is clearly able to present his knowledge in a most concise and readable fashion. The result is that this is a very good book which will appeal to and be of use to all who are interested in guns and shooting. The book, too, is full of illustrations, diagrams and needful information. And to show the ground covered it can be said that the book takes one from the Kentucky gun shop of Wyatt Atkinson who fashion rifles as they did 200 years ago to shooting driven grouse on a Scottish moor.

In this wide field are covered a variety of subjects on ballistics, wing shooting, big game cartridges, skeet, guns and rifles of every description—in fact a very great deal of what the shooter likes to know or at least to read about.

Many a reader will be intrigued, for instance, by this paragraph quoted from the chapter on Lyman Gun Sights: "The Lymans of Middlefield, Connecticut, have found the ideal way of life. They live in the country—and handsome country it is, too. But they don't take a train to the city every morning. They stay where they are and practice what the Department of Agriculture calls diversified farming. It's possible that the Lyman farm is the most diversified of all diversified farms." This is one of the best chapters.—W.H.T.L.

Antique Guns, by Hank Wieand Bowman and Lucian Cary (Arco Publishing Company Ltd., 10 Fitzroy Street, London, W.1, 15s.). This profusely illustrated book will be invaluable to not only experienced and new collectors but to all those sportsmen (and today there are many) who are interested in the history of guns and in the art of their manufacture. Mr. Bowman travelled widely to gather his material and took many photos, all of which appear in the 144 pages of this book for the first time. Bound in cloth with a five colour jacket the book is an excellent sample of production.

Among its contents are chapters on the history of small firearms, muskets and rifles, pistols, derringers, pepperboxes, percussion revolvers, metal cartridge revolvers etc. Among many items of historical interest is mentioned the fact that Major Hugh Smiley of Henniker, New Hampshire, has in his collection a flintlock sporting gun designed for King George I, which is a breech loading cartridge gun made in Amsterdam prior to 1727 and which precedes the eventual development of the breech-loading cartridge guns by more than a century.

It is also pointed out that the French and Austrians had air guns two centuries ago which fired bronze balls and could drop large game or a man at 50 yards! The book is indeed full of interest for anyone who shoots or has knowledge of small arms of any description.—W.H.T.L.

A Horseman Through Six Reigns, by Horace Smith (Odhams, 15s.). The author (who taught the Queen to ride) has lived and worked among horses for threequarters of a century, and has won countless prizes at major horse shows throughout Britain, from the International Horse Show downwards. As a dealer, he has bought and sold nearly 12,000 horses during his lifetime. As a judge of horses he has always been in great demand.

In this brightly written autobiography Mr. Smith takes the reader back through the years to a world of the past—a world of leisurely days that we shall never know again. When his career began, the horse was the normal form of road transport. He joined his father in the well-established family business of W. J. Smith Ltd., Horse Dealers, when he was sixteen, and his fascinating stories of the cut-throat competition in the trade in London in those days make unusual and exciting reading. He recounts vividly the thrills of coaching to Epsom on Derby Day, and tells of deals made at a time when a pair of carriage horses could fetch £1,000, and he retrieves for us all the pomp and pageantry of the ring at Olympia presided over by Lord Lonsdale.

The author was appointed Royal Riding Master to the Queen (then Princess Elizabeth), and he has many observations to make about the Royal sisters' horsemanship, beside that of others of the Royal Family. This is a volume, fully illustrated with excellent photographs, and packed with delightful anecdotes, which will endear itself to every lover of the horse, be he or she, young or in the sear and yellow, as well as to the general reader.

Youth in the Saddle, edited by W. E. Lyon (Collins, 12s. 6d.). This book, to which a number of famous riders have contributed, covers every subject of interest and importance to the horse or pony lover, and is an indispensable reference book, as well as a thoroughly practical account of horses and riding.

Very fully illustrated, it includes, among many others, contributions on Buying a Pony; Learning to Ride; The Care of a Pony; The Elementary Schooling of a horse and Pony; Fox Hunting; Riding to Hounds; Point-to-Points; Show Jumping; Showing; First Aid.

The Essentials of Horsemanship, by Brigadier-General J. F. Lamont (Constable, 12s. 6d.) General Lamont, in this most practical handbook of good horsemanship, offers a life-time of experience to readers. His book differs from most, in that the author is no theorist and rides no hobby horse of his own.

The book (illustrated with eight excellent photographs) is written in the style of a military manual; it is terse, to the point, and as thoroughly informed as one would expect from a horseman who was the original of Siegfried Sassoon's famous character "Boots" Brownrigg.

Towser, by Henry Lamond (Faber and Faber, 12s. 6d.). Author of "Big Red" and "The Manx Star," in this story Mr. Lamond gives a fine, virile, true-to-life picture of that most intelligent, hard-working, loyal creature—an Australian trained sheep dog. The story itself is dated—towards the end of the first decade of this century—and shows us life on an Australian sheep station as a fine and gripping background to the actual study of Towser.

Two things particularly impress this reviewer. It is obvious to him (he, himself, having trained many gundogs) that any would-be gundog trainer who is sufficiently intelligent and understanding as to be likely to make a good job of it, could benefit in no small measure by reading this book. For, while the training of a gundog may differ in many essentials to that of an Australian sheep dog, the author, in the course of his excellent story, demonstrates, to full advantage, the use and application of canine psychology. His own knowledge of the dog mind is great, and he passes it on, seemingly with effortless ease to the reader. This reviewer, therefore, recommends any would-be trainer of gundogs to procure what books he thinks best on the actual technique of training, but would add that the addition of this book (although a story) is almost essential.

The second point which impresses him (for he is a great believer in it) is the author's insistance on the almost uncanny use of telepathy between man and dog. He is able to give his dog orders when the latter is too far away to hear them, simply by "willing" those orders along the invisible lines of mental connection. Any good and understanding dog trainer must recognise that some sort of telepathic connection between human and canine mind does indeed exist, and Mr. Lamond makes far more of the fact (and rightly so) than does the average gundog trainer.

This then, is a vivid, colourful, exciting story of men who lived rough and worked hard amid the barren wastes of a sheep station in the days when such stations were principalities in size; managers were local kings; overseers were of the blood royal; any property less than about a thousand square miles and carrying fewer than 100,000 sheep, was not worth considering as a *real* station. It is a book which is recommended without reservation.

Winter, by Cornelius Osgood (Robert Hale, 18s.). Say the publishers: "In all the literature of personal adventure there is probably no book to compare with this strange and haunting record of one man's experiences in the Far North." North of the Great Bear Lake, in the wastes and beauties of a desperate land, where bitter gales sweep the barren tundra and violent storms play hide-and-seek among the mountains, the author fought a continual battle to provide food for himself and for his dogs. It is upon his dogs—their welfare, their innate savagry, their bitter and even mortal fights for leadership—that the author lays special emphasis, for, on the long treks, man and dogs were forced into a deep level of companionship. We follow not only a civilised, educated man into a primitive world, but are shown clearly these fantasies of the human mind inseparable under such conditions.

Mr. Osgood meets many strange individuals, from trappers to lonely Indians, and their ways become his ways. The main diet of fish on which he and his dogs lived were netted in the Great Lake under extremely difficult circumstances; we read of wolves and geese, and other creatures of the barren lands. This lone man's record is a delight in the very details it describes, and one of remarkable sensitivity.

The book is illustrated with chapter-headings by Jean Day, and with a map showing the district covered between the Mackenzie River and the Arctic Ocean.

Salisbury Plain, by Ralph Whitlock (Robert Hale, 18s.). "The populous pivot of prehistoric Britain, Salisbury Plain experienced its era of high importance three thousand years ago. Stonehenge was young. The hilltops were crowned by stockaded villages and towns. The grassy chalk prairies formed a vast island of open pasture in an ocean of primeval swamp and forest."

Thus the Plain of the past, a past part of which remains in the present. During the last forty years, however, we can view the landscape from quite a different angle—as a training ground for modern armies, and as a landing ground for the armies of the air. New blood has been pumped into the towns and villages, and the Plain is populous once more.

Here is a grand and colourful picture by a great countryman and agriculturist, contained between the pages of one of the most exciting and thought-provoking volumes of the publishers' Regional Book Series. Fully illustrated, it becomes a "must" for all those who delight in this particular area of Britain, who have soldiered there, or farmed and shot within the area. And this area the author has known "like the back of his hand" since he was a boy.

The Inexhaustible Sea, by Hawthorne Daniel and Francis Minot (Macdonald, 16s.). During the past century and a half, the population of the world has increased on an unprecedented scale. As this increase continues, the question becomes ever more pressing: "How are we to feed these hungry millions?" There are limits within sight to the productivity of the soil. Therefore, it seems obvious that we must turn to the oceans which cover almost three-quarters of the globe.

But, while they form a most convenient highway for shipping, it is remarkable how very little indeed is still known of them. Their teeming waters, however, abound in virtually untapped sources of food supply, and, in this most interesting and practical book, the authors give an over-all picture of life under the waters as it is so far known, and make practical suggestions on how that life may be used to feed the people upon earth. We shall one day have to bring the measureless resources of the oceans into the services of mankind.

To give but one example of a start that might be made in this direction: "The closing of suitable bays or coves by physical, electrical, or other means, so that fish populations would be literally fenced within the chosen area, while ocean water with its contents of nutrient chemicals would circulate with the tides. The area would be fertilised, the eggs and young restrained from drifting or escaping, and predatory inhabitants would be exterminated. At the right stage, the species under cultivation would be harvested."

But the oceans also contain minerals, etc., etc., of immeasurable value. In fact, as we farm and mine the land today, so may we one day farm and mine the oceans. This is a vast and exciting subject well handled by the authors, and brings to light many interesting factors unthought of by the great majority of people. The book is illustrated with a number of fine photographs.

Trout and **Bass,** the former by W. A. Adamson, the latter by Alan Young (Herbert Jaenkins, 3s. 6d. each), are two first-rate and practically informative little books of nearly a 100 pages each belonging to the now famous series "How to Catch Them" upon which the publishers have received unstinted praise from countless anglers, both tyro and experienced. Other volumes in the series deal with Pike, Perch, Roach, Chub, Tench, and Bream, all by specialist authors.

While one can buy countless books on angling in its many forms, the publishers wisely foresaw that a cheap specialised series was badly needed, and they thus produced a series of pocket-size volumes each of which gives complete information by an expert on its particular subject, and in which tackle and methods of fishing are clearly illustrated by line drawings.

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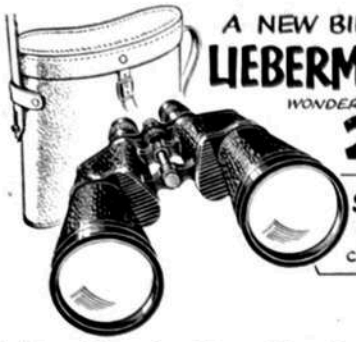

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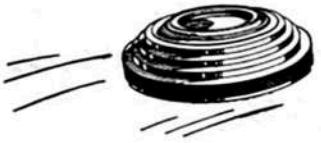

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